

## THE RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF MALIQ II CULTURE



### Archaeology

**Keywords:** Maliq culture, Eneolithic, pottery, decoration, chronology.

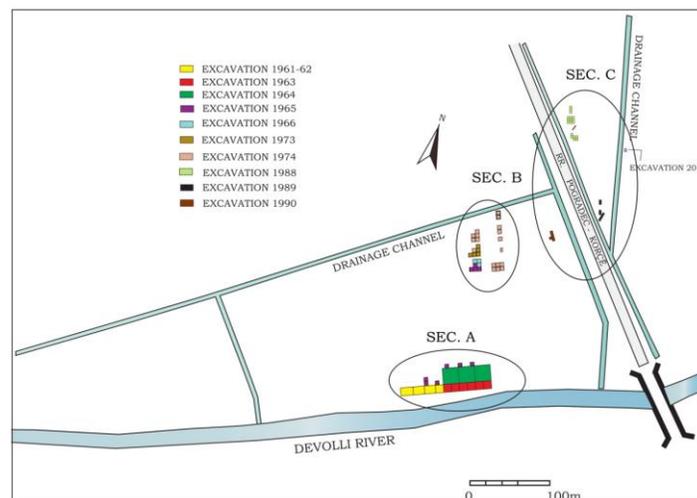
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### Abstract

The Eneolithic period in Albania is well represented in the settlement of Maliq and it is known as Maliq II culture. The material culture of this period is very rich and diverse, and it leads to a better understanding of the evolution of this culture in Albania. Maliq II culture has been the focus of numerous studies. According to material culture, especially pottery, the eneolithic period in Maliq is divided in two phases: Maliq IIA and Maliq IIB. Maliq IIA phase relates stratigraphically to the pile dwelling habitation, destroyed by a fire or some burning event. The layer of Maliq IIB phase follows the Maliq IIA stratum without any visible hiatus. The typology of vessel shape is very diverse. The most common forms are the semi-spherical bowls, conical and biconical cups; vessels with elliptical mouth; conical vase with a handle below the rim; conical plates with inverted rim; handle cups; casseroles, fruit bowls; conical, cylindrical and “basket” form lids, and others. Similar to the vessel shape typology, the decorative variants of Maliq IIA and IIB phase are numerous as well: painted decoration (grey, red, white and graffiti), incised and punctured ornamentation, plastic decoration and fluting.

The Eneolithic period in Albania is well represented in the settlement of Maliq and it is known as Maliq II culture. The thickness of this cultural layer is approximately 2 m, as observed in the excavated trenches of Sector A (Fig.1). The material culture of this period is very rich and diverse, and it leads to a better understanding of the evolution of this culture in Albania. Maliq II culture has been the focus of numerous studies. According to previous research, the Eneolithic culture of Maliq is divided in three phases: Maliq Ib, IIA and IIB<sup>1</sup>. At the last publication of the Prehistory of Albania, the authors have renamed those, Maliq IIA, Maliq IIB and Maliq IIC phases because they consider Maliq Ib, Maliq IIA and Maliq IIB phases to belong to the same period, Eneolithic<sup>2</sup>.



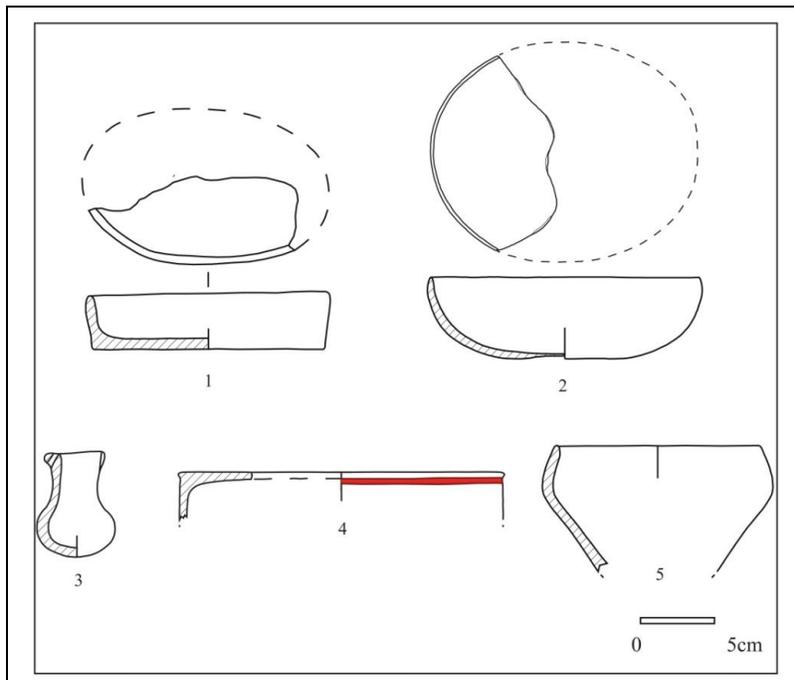
**Fig. 1.** The general plan of Maliq excavations

<sup>1</sup> Prendi 2018, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p. 257.

## Maliq Ib Phase

Maliq Ib (Maliq IIA<sup>3</sup>) phase, is considered as a transitional phase for the formation of the Eneolithic culture of Maliq<sup>4</sup>. Stratigraphically this phase follows that of Maliq Ia which belongs to late Neolithic. The material culture of Maliq Ib phase follows the tradition of Maliq Ia phase in some indicators, such as construction structures, stone and lithic tools, and pottery styles. A copper chisel, encountered in the Maliq Ib layer, has been considered by Frano Prendi relates this with the first appearance of copper tools. The ceramic assemblage is very similar to its preceding phase, Maliq Ia, consisting of grey and black luster, black-topped, crusted, painted with liquid colors. There are, however, changes between these two phases, especially in the proportional ratios of these ceramic categories. The incised and punctured decoration with linear motifs is very rare in Maliq Ia phase, but it becomes the dominant decorative category during the subsequent Maliq Ib phase. The grey painted ornamentation, which appears during the Middle Neolithic culture of Dunavec<sup>5</sup>, begins in this phase and in Maliq IIA phase becomes the main decoration technique. In this phase, the main vessel forms are: the conical plates with inverted rim; vessels with elliptical mouth; “milk” vessels; casseroles; conical cups; conical and cylindrical lids, and others<sup>6</sup> (Fig.2). All these elements are indicators of a transitional phase from Late Neolithic to Eneolithic and to the process of the autochthonous formation of Maliq II culture.



**Fig. 2.** The type of the vessels of Maliq Ib phase

<sup>3</sup> Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.257.

<sup>4</sup> Prendi 1974, p.390. ; Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.; Prendi 2018, p.191.

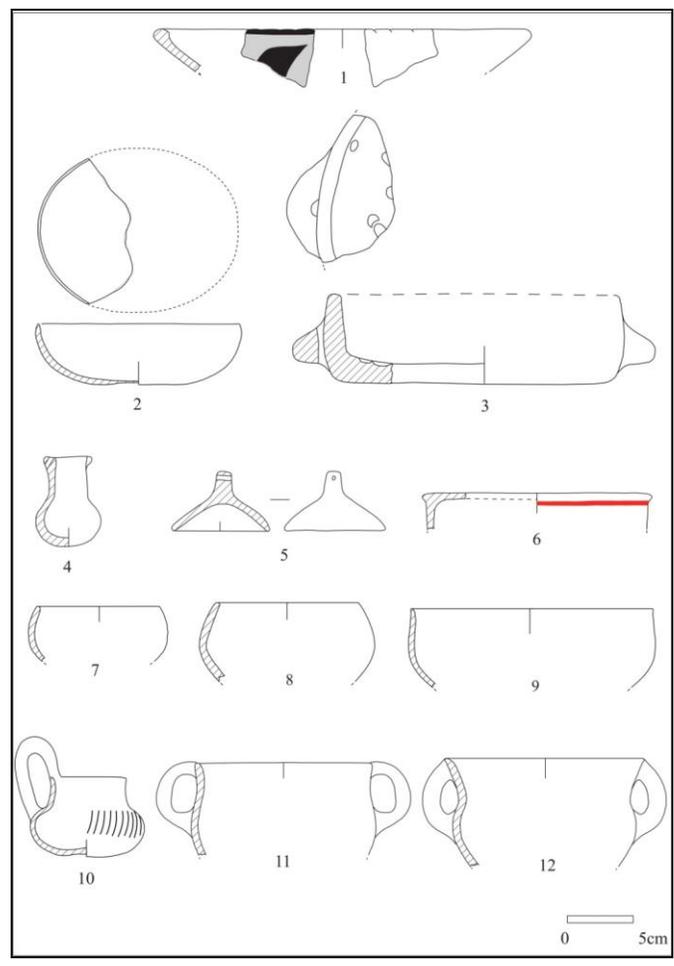
<sup>5</sup> Korkuti 74, p.386.

<sup>6</sup> Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.262; Prendi 2018, p.44.

### Maliq IIa Phase

Maliq IIa (Maliq IIb<sup>7</sup>) phase is well represented in Sector A trenches. It relates stratigraphically to the pile dwelling habitation<sup>8</sup>, considered as the first piledwelling settlement discovered in Albania. It was destroyed by a fire or some burning event, which is corroborated by a layer containing burned materials. After this event, the houses were constructed directly on the ground.

The material culture is very rich, containing polished stone tools, lithics, bone and metal objects, jewelry and pottery which help to know the period. The typology of vessel shapes is very diverse and some of the forms continue from the preceding phase. The most common forms of the Maliq IIa phase are the semi-spherical, conical and biconical cups; vessels with elliptical mouth; conical vase with a handle below the rim; conical plates with inverted rim; handle cups; casseroles, fruit bowls; conical, cylindrical and “basket” form lids, and others<sup>9</sup> (Fig.3).



**Fig. 3.** The type of the vessels of Maliq IIa phase

<sup>7</sup> Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.264.

<sup>8</sup> Korkuti 2010, p.228.

<sup>9</sup> Prendi 1976, p. 40, Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.283.

Similar to the vessel shape typology, the decorative variants of Maliq IIa phase are numerous as well. Emblematic of the pottery assemblages of this culture is painted decoration, (grey, red, white and graffiti) with linear and geometric motifs<sup>10</sup>. Other techniques used during this phase are incised and punctured ornamentation with the same motifs like grey painted decoration; plastic decoration; and fluting. (Fig.4)



**Fig. 4.** The decoration of Maliq IIa pottery

### **Maliq IIb Phase**

Stratigraphically, the layer of this phase follows the Maliq IIa stratum without any visible hiatus. Maliq IIb or Maliq IIc<sup>11</sup> phase ceramic assemblages are dissimilar to the preceding phase by the quantities of vessel form and decoration.

<sup>10</sup> Prendi 1966, p.259; Prendi 1976, p.40; Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.285; Prendi 2018, p.61.

<sup>11</sup> Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p. 287.

The surface treatment of the pottery from this phase has a good quality, as demonstrated by the frequent application of polished and sometimes burnished techniques. Some of the forms of the pottery that were very rare in Maliq IIA phase, during Maliq IIB phase increase in frequency, such as: vessels with S-profile, amphorae, *kantharoi*, conical plates with inverted rim and fluting decoration<sup>12</sup>, handle cups like Baden types<sup>13</sup> etc (fig. 3; 1, 10, 11, 12).

The same thing is for the decoration. Several motifs that were intensively used during Maliq IIA phase become less frequent in Maliq IIB; while other decorative motifs, limited in Maliq IIA phase dominate in the Maliq IIB phase assemblages (such as fluting)<sup>14</sup> (fig. 4; 10, 11, 12).

A reevaluation of the Maliq II pottery stored in the Archaeological Storage of Tirana, National Museum, Archaeological Museum of Tirana and Korça revealed that this period should be divided in two phases: Maliq IIA and Maliq IIB. The reasons for dividing the Maliq II culture in two phases are threefold: (1) the decorative techniques; (2) the vessel morphology; and (3) the type of the houses.

In the first phase Maliq IIA, the grey painted decoration is more frequent and in the second phase Maliq IIB, the decoration with fluting is dominant. The two phases are not encountered in all the excavation sectors because the thickness of the cultural layers is not the same. This division is well represented in the Trench A4, A5 and K5 of Sector A (fig. 1). The vessel categories are almost the same for the two phases, but the category frequencies are different. Vessels with vertical handles and conical plates with inverted rim, decorated with fluting are more frequent in Maliq IIB phase. Also, the surface of the vessels is more burnished and in some of them we can even see the traces of the tool.

Beside pottery decoration and morphology, which define the division of Maliq II in two phases, another element that helps this definition is the variation in habitational structures. As mentioned previously, the first pile-dwelling settlement discovered in Albania was discovered in Maliq. The remains of it are found in the first layers of excavation and after a fire, demonstrated by a burned layer, the houses were constructed directly on the ground. Maliq IIA phase is associated with the pile-dwelling settlement, while in the second phase, Maliq IIB, houses were built on the ground. Based on this, we think that the changes of the settlement's type constitute the two phases of Maliq II culture.

Regarding to phase Maliq Ib or Maliq IIA (according to Prendi, Bunguri 2014), I think that it is difficult to determine. The archaeological material, especially ceramic, doesn't support this idea. The pottery belonging to Maliq Ib phase is found in Sector B<sup>15</sup>. Frano Prendi argues that Maliq Ib has the same cultural characteristics as Maliq Ia, such as architectural features, lithic tools and pottery types. In addition, Prendi states that the copper tools in Albania appear in this

<sup>12</sup> Prendi 2018, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Tasic 1995, Pl. XVII, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Prendi, Bunguri 2014, p.288

<sup>15</sup> Prendi 2018, pp. 27-28

phase, based on a copper chisel found in a trench of Sector B, which is characteristic of eneolithic cultures of Balkan.

However, all the copper tools found in the archaeological excavations in Maliq come from Trench A2 (1962) and Trench A11 and A12 (1964), not from the trenches of Sector B where Maliq Ib is encountered according to F. Prendi. It is very difficult to divide a phase from the other based on stone, lithic and bone tools. The tools are not different between Late Neolithic and Eneolithic. The only change between them is the appearance of copper tools, but we don't have copper tools from all the Eneolithic settlements. So, Prendi's arguments, the tools (stone, lithic and bone) don't support the presence of Maliq Ib phase. The only argument that supports Prendi's hypothetical phases is changes in pottery types; although, even this is not very clear.

In the most recent publications of F. Prendi regarding the Maliq settlement, he introduces the eastern profile of Trench IX (excavated in 1965), thus arguing that there are three phases, Maliq Ia – Late Neolithic, Maliq Ib – Early Eneolithic, Maliq IIa – Middle Eneolithic and Maliq IIIa – Early Bronze Age<sup>16</sup>. According to the pottery found in this trench, it shows that it belongs to the Late Neolithic period and the last phase of Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age, not to the Eneolithic period. The pottery exhibits characteristics of Late Neolithic decorated with *matt* painted with different motifs. There are a few fragments of pottery decorated with *white and red paste*, which is present in Eneolithic layer too. This cannot be an element to prove the existence of the Proto-Eneolithic phase because this pottery (*white and red paste*) is found in the same layers of Late Neolithic. Except this trench (Trench IX), pottery characteristic that are typical to Maliq Ib phase is found in some trenches of sector B. The predominant pottery type is the grey or black, with incised and punctuated decoration and linear and geometric motifs. Prendi argues that this pottery is very rare in Maliq Ia phase and it becomes the main element of Maliq Ib and Maliq IIa phase. This is not entirely accurate because the pottery of Barç (Barç II)<sup>17</sup> and Dërsnik<sup>18</sup> settlements that belong to the earliest phase of the Late Neolithic is characterized by these same elements, namely the grey or black color and incised and punctuated decoration. Based on this, we can say that Maliq Ia phase belongs to the earliest phase of late Neolithic, not to the second one, as it is accepted until now. In addition, pottery with the characteristics mentioned above has been encountered in the last cultural layers of trenches in Sector B, and this tells that it's impossible to find the Eneolithic material under the Late Neolithic layers.

The only trenches where we find cultural material that belong to Late Neolithic and Eneolithic are Trench VI of the 1965 excavation, and one trench of point C3 of Sector C (excavation season 1989-1990). Regarding to the Eneolithic material found in Trench VI we see that Eneolithic layers starts at depth 1.1 m and goes until subsoil. Also, the material of late Neolithic started in the same depth and goes until subsoil. This indicates that Maliq exhibits both a vertical and horizontal stratigraphy. These types of stratigraphic arrangements prevent the

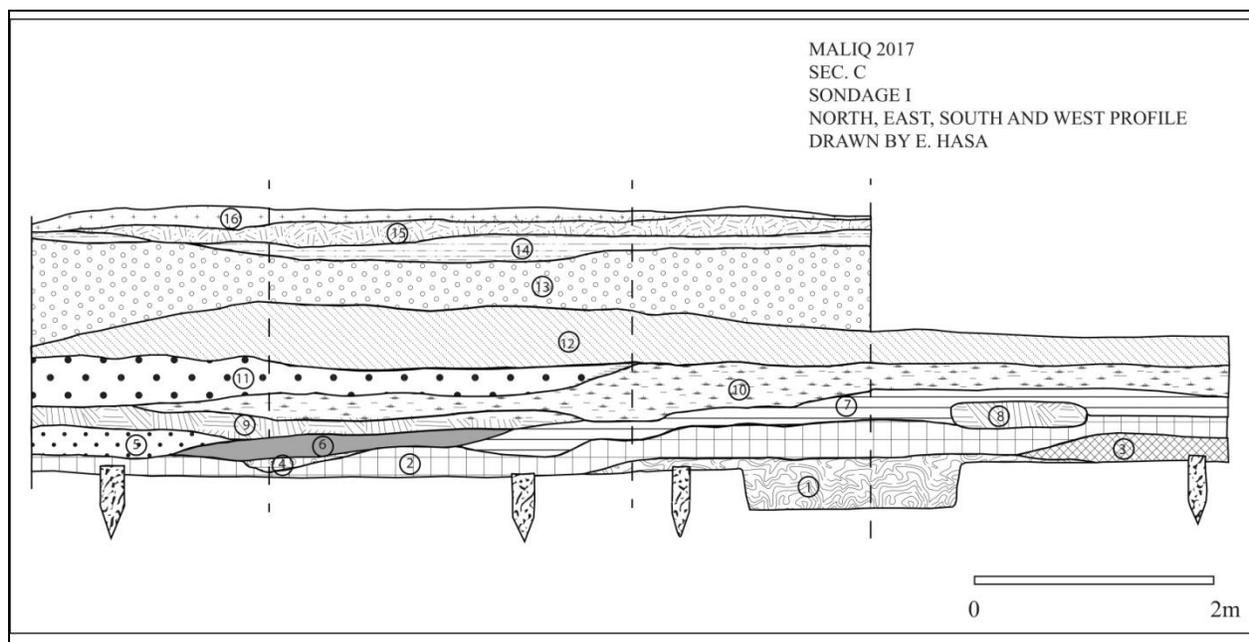
<sup>16</sup> Prendi 2018, fig. 10

<sup>17</sup> Lera 1983, p. 244; Lera 2009, pp. 69-70

<sup>18</sup> Lera 1988, p. 43; Lera 2009, pp. 40-42

possibility to clearly discuss the existence of a phase that is between late Neolithic and Eneolithic period. At the same time, the archaeological material found in point C3 of Sector C is very mixed and the pottery sherds lack the necessary locational information. The sherds' label contains only the year of the excavation and the sector, not the Trench number and cultural layer. Hence, there are no supporting data for the presence of any other period, except the usual Late Neolithic and Eneolithic. In addition, we don't know the thickness of the layers or any other information.

The results of the more recent test excavations in Maliq in 2017<sup>19</sup> provide further support for the reason to divide the Maliq II culture in two phases. During these tests, it was revealed that the Eneolithic layer is not very thick (layer 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and it is associated to a pile-dwelling settlement, similar to the one in Sector A, indicating that we are dealing with the earliest phase of the period (Fig.5). The ceramic is characterized by dark color, polished surface, and incised decoration. Whereas the grey painted decoration is rare. The material is similar to Trench A5 – A6 (1963 excavation). Based on the characteristics of the pottery, we can infer that this material could belong to the Late Neolithic or the transitional phase between Late Neolithic and Eneolithic. If we look at the stratigraphy, we notice that Eneolithic layer is immediately after early Bronze Age layer. While the Late Neolithic stratum (Maliq Ia and Maliq Ib according to F. Prendi), encountered in Sector B is divided by a clay layer without finds.



**Fig. 5.** The profile of Sondage I

As a conclusion, based on the data mentioned above, Maliq II culture can be divided in two phases Maliq IIa and Maliq IIb, not in three phases Maliq Ib, IIa and IIb<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Hasa 2018, p.417

<sup>20</sup> Prendi 1974, p.390

The Proto-Eneolithic phase or the phase between late Neolithic and Neolithic, it is represented very well in cultural layers of Burimas settlement (Burimas II)<sup>21</sup> If we will see the Eneolithic period in a wider context, it will be divided as below:

**Table 1.** The phases of Eneolithic period in Albania

Early Eneolithic	Middle Eneolithic	Late Eneolithic
Burimas II	Maliq IIa	Maliq IIb
Kamnik II?	Benjë I	Tren II
	Katundas IV	Podgori IV
	Konispol IV	Nezir III
	Gradec	Blaz IV
		Dajç I

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<sup>21</sup> Korkuti 2010, pp. 217-228.