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COPPER AGE–BRONZE AGE TRANSFORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE EARLY BRONZE COMMUNITIES (IV–III MILLENNIUM CAL. BCE)

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Abstract

Aim. To elaborate on the existing theoretical models describing cultural processes in the Balkans during the 4th and 3rd millennia cal. BCE from the perspective of the archaeology of pre-historic societies.

Methodology. The research was conducted using the methods of synthesis and comparative analysis, as well as interpretation of well-known and novel archaeological records.

Results. An evolutionary model was developed to describe two types of communities in the Balkans, including traditional and interactive communities.

Research implications. The research results contribute to the theory of evolution of culture in Prehistory, thereby elucidating our understanding of cultural processes in the Balkans during the 4th and 3rd millennia cal. BCE.

Keywords: Balkans, Copper Age, Early Bronze age, archaeology of pre-historic societies, traditional communities, interactive communities

ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ И ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ СООБЩЕСТВ РАННЕБРОНЗОВОГО ВЕКА ОТ ЭНЕОЛИТА К БРОНЗОВОМУ ВЕКУ (IV–III ТЫСЯЧЕЛЕТИЯ ДО НАШЕЙ ЭРЫ)

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Аннотация

Цель. Расширить теоретические модели культурных процессов на Балканах в IV и III тысячелетиях до н.э. с точки зрения археологии древних обществ.

Процедура и методы. В исследования использованы синтез, сравнительный анализ и интерпретация традиционных и новых археологических данных.

Результаты. Разработана эволюционная модель, основанная на двух типах обществ на Балканах: традиционного и интерактивного.

Теоретическая и/или практическая значимость. Результаты исследования способствуют дальнейшему развитию теории эволюции культуры первобытных обществ и обеспечивают более глубокое понимание культурных процессов на Балканах в период IV и III тысячелетий до н.э.

Ключевые слова: Балканы, медный век, ранний бронзовый век, археология древних обществ, традиционные общества, интерактивные общества

Introduction

Materiality of Prehistory is the primary and most important source for understanding the longest period of human history. It has different dimensions, including material cul-

ture reproduced by people as well as biological culture (plant, animal, and human remains) supplemented by the prehistoric geographical culture. Beyond the prehistoric material database, other sources exist for which genealogical roots go deep into prehistory—most importantly, historical linguistics.

Setting

The biggest problem related to prehistoric materiality is that evolution is under the pressure of time, and we need a considerable cultural material change to be able to recognize its historical dimension. This specific example of the historical record very easily opens the door to different migration theories. In particular, it prompts consideration of the theories of the Indo-European population's migration from east to west (the Aryan theory), from west to east (the Steppe theory), and from southeast to northwest (the Neolithic theory). None of them is without considerable gaps, however, and all of them are based on selective records and limited methodology [2].

From the perspectives of the Balkans, it appears that the problem of Copper Age-Bronze Age transformation in earlier 4th millennium cal. BCE in this region is a subject of debate in both past and modern historiography. However, in most of the cases, the debate was/is not about the records and their interpretation, but about how bigger theories have been applied to this chronological span and the documented cultures. Deductive reasoning dominates, including the most recent genetic replication of some of the archaeological models, in particular that of M. Gimbutas, although the latter was buried by the archaeological critical theory of the 20th century. The main gap in all migration models that propose invasions from the presumably proto-Indo-European region to the north of the Black Sea in westerly and southwesterly directions is the inability to incorporate the diversity of the records into a complex model replaced by the flattened population change model, which is easy to build but difficult to defend.

My task in this work is difficult: following the main directions of my research over the last several decades, I will model a Copper Age-Bronze Age change as *a transformation from one type of community into another type of community*. The meaning of this transformation comes from communities with a traditional pattern of reproduction changing into interactive communities in which the tradition functioned as an interactive mechanism of development showing cohesion between closer and more distant neighbors. That means *the interaction itself becomes a pattern of tradition*.

The earlier 21st century is more beneficial when researching later prehistoric material evidence from Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Embracing the democracy ushered in after 1989, the devastating practice of excavation over large areas with rough methodology has been gradually abandoned, and the main new data come from rescue excavations undertaken at different scales. Despite some exceptions, Prehistory is no longer a subject of political interest or a career path for people with specific political affiliations, and this creates a more academic environment for research and interpretation of the data. Beyond local archaeologists, international teams have been working to improve the quality of the research and to make Balkan prehistoric records a reliable source for interpretation based on the grounded theory. Different collections of research results also attempt to develop the understanding of the cultural processes using diverse methodologies (e.g. [27; 11; 22; 3]). The genetic data were also included in the research, with still very problematic conclusions (see [15] and ref. cited there).

The goal of this work is to develop an argument about the genesis and evolution of the interactive communities in the Balkans during the Bronze Age (abt. mid 4th–3rd millennium cal. BCE). The general chronological frames follow Nikolova 1999, including the following stages:

Stage 1. Early Bronze I: abt. ?3600/3500–abt. 3000 BCE

Stage 2. Early Bronze II: abt. 3000–abt. 2500/2400 cal BCE

Stage 3. Early Bronze III: abt. 2500/2400–abt. 2000 cal BCE

Genesis and evolution of the Early Bronze communities in the Balkans

Early Bronze I

One of the most important directions of development of the hypothesis of interactive communities is the interpretation of the archaeological evidence from the Balkans and Anatolia [13]. Specific pottery shapes even connect the Balkans with Kurusay. That, along with later 20th-century outlines [12] and some results from newer excavations, shows the genesis of the Early Bronze Age in the Balkans was a result of cultural interactions of communities, the origin of which was in different homelands – the Balkans, Anatolia / North Aegean, Central Europe and Northwest / North Black Sea.

The first component of Early Bronze communities included descendants of the Final Copper communities of Cernavoda I, Sălcuța IV-Telish IV, Yagodina, and similar communities of this period. For possible climatic and economic reasons, the population during the Final Copper Age in the Balkans gradually decreased. The general transformation from an agricultural toward a stockbreeding-based economy transformed the reproduction pattern into smaller families with demographic consequences. Among the recent findings is the site of Bezhanovo in Central Bulgaria from earlier 4th millennium cal. BCE [28]. The pottery of this site clearly shows the gradual devolution of the Krivodol-Sălcuța-Bubanj ceramic style and elements of Sălcuța IV without Scheibenhenkel components.

At the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, the second very important tendency was the population's interaction with Anatolia, along with the possible small-scale migrations from Anatolia to the Balkans. The biggest argument for such a hypothesis is Yunatsite tell, where urn baby burials were

very popular—in the earlier Bronze Age levels, in particular. Although Ezero is close to Anatolia, such burials are not specific to the tell. Since the material culture of Sitagroi IV has an analogy in Yunatsite I culture from the Western Upper Thrace (Dubene-Sarovka IIA), we believe part of the population in Thrace came from the North Aegean, possibly rooted in northwest Anatolia. Very important new discoveries from Katarraktes cave [23] add new characteristics to the Early Bronze in the Southern Balkans – the life in the caves of the stockbreeders which was typical of the Final Bronze Age in the Balkans, continued to characterize the style of life of Balkan population marking the continuity between the Final Copper and Early Bronze. The archaic features of the pottery of phase B include distant analogies even in Cernavoda I [23] and provide excellent evidence of the role of the interactions for the formations of the Early Bronze Age communities.

The very strong integration of the Lower Danube-Middle Danube communities has an expression in the Cernavoda III-Boleraz horizon. These interactions, evidenced most strongly in the similarity of pottery, can be explained by economic exchange and the free movement of people. This includes intermarriages and inner migrations of households mainly in the direction from west to east, since the Lower Danube was obviously considerably depopulated during the Final Copper Age. The hallmark of the Cernavoda III-Boleraz ceramic style – the elder ornament – originated in the Middle Danube, and it did not penetrate Thrace. This allows us to think about some ethnographic functions of the motif and the purposeful differentiation of the Thracian communities.

Last but not least, the penetration of the Pit Grave Culture from the northwest Black Sea toward the Lower Danube basin took place during the later Early Bronze I, with some traces also in northern Eastern Thrace. The material culture, and especially the gradual increase of the EBA I settlements in the Balkans (with the exception of Dobrudzha), clearly show PGC was a small population

component of the Balkan interactive communities during EBA I. Obviously, they occupied the steppe region of the eastern Lower Danube and easily became part of the Balkan multicultural interactive population. At the same time, new data and the use of the traditional typological contemporary approach (see e.g., [4] and cited lit.) clearly demonstrates that archaeologists are still far away from proposing models based on the grounded theory, and that we need innovations both in the methodology of excavations and in the interpretation of the archaeological evidence to promote more detailed pictures of the cultural processes related to the steppe-origin population presence in the Balkans.

Early Bronze Age I occupation on tells like Ezero (the earliest EB horizons) and Yunatsite (the earliest EB horizons) together with Dubene-Sarovka IIA covers only the later part of the period. The team of Drama believes that the Early Bronze I site resembles Cernavoda III culture. None of them can be dated to the very beginning of Early Bronze in Thrace. Accordingly, despite of the visible progress of filling with archaeological evidence the 4th millennium cal BCE, there are many chronological gaps at micro- and mezo-regional levels.

Also, it is difficult to distinguish a specific chronological horizon of EB I tumuli and graves of PGC in the Balkans if we follow the grounded theory. For the time being, the problem is more theoretical – whether the migration was a graduate process during EB I and EB II, or the EB II buried population were descendants of EB I immigrants.

The archaeological characteristics of PGC in the Balkans and its chronological and cultural interrelations with the other Balkan cultures do not recognize the barriers of this culture as invaders or “mass migration” (e.g. [18; 17; 1; 7; 21]). PGC communities were pastoral immigrants who either were able to develop social systems of interacted households, or integrated with the local sedentary and semi-sedentary communities.

Early Bronze II

This was the period when the Balkan Early Bronze Age cultures flourished. The economic infrastructure was based on agriculture, stockbreeding, bronze metallurgy, and internal and external trade. It is very interesting to hypothesize how the interactive communities understood trade and how it functioned during the Early Bronze II, since trade was the main contributor to the prosperity of the communities.

One of the components of the hypothesis is the fact that different communities kept pottery as an ethnographic indicator of their cultural and possibly ethnical identity. Despite similar techniques of decoration and general similarities in the ceramic styles, the Balkan communities lived in their own ethnographic regions, determined by specific ceramic styles – Ezero and Yunatsite in Upper Thrace, Ezerovo II and Sozopol on the western Black Sea shore, SitagroiVa-Dikili Tash IIIB in the Northern Aegean, Pernik in Southwest Bulgaria, Coțofeni II-III in the western Lower Danube basin, Kostolac in the western Lower Danube, Vičedol in the southern Lower Danube, etc. Pit Grave Culture continued to occupy Dobrudzha and northern Central Bulgaria (Goran-Slatina), but the data do not show that Early Bronze II was a period of massive invasion. In contrast, it is very likely that the households of Pit Grave Culture in the eastern Lower Danube followed the social structure of the other Balkan ethnographic regions, and the absence of opportunities for free movement made them resistant to accepting big new groups of Pit Grave Culture from the Northwest Black Sea. Respectively, many PGC graves and tumuli in Coțofeni culture from the Early Bronze II could be a result of inner movements in the Balkans, including intermarriages. This is also the period of vast expansion of Coțofeni ceramic style in Eastern Serbia [24; 8].

Regional sustainability and prosperity resulted in the increase in both the population and the individual wealth of the households. Gold earrings and hair ornaments had be-

come standard expressions of prosperity, not a reflection of a specific high social status [5]. They show the role of gathering of placer gold, although the main exchange was of bronze implements and weapons. During the earlier 3rd millennium, the Balkans developed as a region and became an integral part of the Anatolian-Aegean-Balkan cultural system, as seen in the evidence of the trade of bronze implements/weapons. Meanwhile, the society evolved into a system of interactive chiefdoms, the sustainability of which was due to the general prosperity of the communities.

Among the most important bronze finds during Early Bronze II, which continued to be produced in Early Bronze III, as well, were the flange axes. They were distributed on both sides – to the north of the Danube basin [20] and to the south of the Danube [12]. Of special interest is the flange axe from Dubene-Sarovka, which was made of lead bronze and shows interactions of technology between two sizable regions: while lead bronze was characteristic of the Aegean, the shape was typical of Central Europe. Also, the encrusted pottery with typical zigzag ornament was very popular at Dubene-Sarovka IIB, connects Western Thrace with SitagroiVa and even with Thasos. The techniques and ornamentation on the bowl from Limenaria ([9]: Fig. 25) is identical with the ceramic style of Dubene-Sarovka IIB.

In the context of the general picture of the Early Bronze II, the discovered gold jewelry from Dubene-BalinovGorun [16] was not an exception for the Balkans, but a sign of the equally developed processes of accumulation of wealth in Anatolia, the Aegean, and the Balkans. Another such sign is the Rupite cemetery in Southwest Bulgaria [10].

This is the general difference between the traditional societies of the Late Copper Age and the interactive societies of the Early Bronze II – the most representative wealth was reserved during the Later Copper Age for single leaders as an expression of high social-religious status (Varna gold cemetery). During Early Bronze II, representative wealth was a marker of the prosperity of the interactive

communities, without being dependent on the political-religious hierarchical structure.

Early Bronze Age III

It seems that, during Early Bronze III, the economic center of the Balkans moved into the Carpathians. Guluvovo shows that Upper Thrace continued contacts with Anatolia, but gradually, the lifestyle was transformed into one in which stockbreeding societies dominated, with possible central places.

A prototype of such a structure may be Dubene-Sarovka. Although without visible hiatus on the site, the thickness of the cultural layer is inconsiderable in comparison to the Yunatsite tell. This could be a result of the lower intensity of life and of the fact that that part of the community was made up of stockbreeders who lived in the Stara Planina Mountains most of the time. Since there was production of bronze implements and weapons at Dubene-Sarovka, the gold jewelry in the style of Anatolian Troy jewelry could be a result of exchange or of traveling jewelers. Unfortunately, the nature of the Balinov Gorun site has remained unclear despite the lengthy excavations. The opportunity for numerous hypotheses – from the destroyed shallow cemetery to a place where the jewelry was hidden with the hope that it would be found after seasonal stockbreeder migration that never happened, makes it impossible to build reasonable, solid, historical hypotheses. No analysis of the gold is provided that would show whether the gold was of local origin. For the time being, it is just a sign of prosperity of the Yunatsite culture community during Early Bronze II-III, and it remains the largest Early Bronze gold jewelry finding in the Balkans.

Some signs of tensions between Thracian communities are well documented through pottery. In the Yunatsite culture during Early Bronze III, pointed-bottom cups were very popular. They were found only as an exception in the Ezero culture. Obviously, the communities of the Ezero culture did not accept the fashion of drinking alcohol that was common among Yunatsite males, despite the genuine attractiveness of the cups and the

existing strong interactions documented in numerous other similarities in the pottery and in the metal and stone industries. At the same time, the Thracian communities did not accept the drinking habits of the Aegean and Anatolian communities. It seems there was a regional dignity in the communities – a strong expression of the oppositional we- they, but only at the ethnographic level of feasts, songs, and folk rituals. Gradually, and for a complexity of reasons, the economic strategies of the mobile and semi-mobile stockbreeding styles of life won out in Thrace, much like in the Final Copper Age.

The life to the north of the Danube in the Balkans continued with strong integrations with the Middle Danube basin (to the west), and with the northwest Black Sea (to the east). The Carpathian communities interacted with the North, as well.

Considerations and conclusion

No records exist that can replace the material culture as the base of understanding the later prehistory of the Balkans. The Early Bronze Age Balkan material culture shows interactive communities with specific ethnographic characteristics. The formation of the sustainable Early Bronze economic and cultural system in the Balkans was built first by a multicultural society during Early Bronze I. This was a period of integration of communities, the origin of which was in the Balkan Final Copper Age, but also in Anatolia, the Middle Danube, and the Northwest Black Sea. The material culture during Early Bronze I-II is the strongest voice against any one-directional invasion hypothesis and any attempt to use archaeological data to explain the Indo-

European language distribution. Most likely, the interactive theory is the most reasonable model for resolving this linguistic problem, since the early I.-E. languages had similar structures, but also considerable differences. That means that, over vast territories, the Early Bronze Age was a period of unification of the cultural systems to serve more effective interactions that assisted the strategies of sustainable and secured communities. Development of an interactive language was a sort of law embraced by the elites, for whom close and distant trade and social-political communication were the bases of prosperity.

The later 20th and early 21st-century discoveries including the Sarovka and BalinovGorun sites at Dubene in western Upper Thrace show that, during the Early Bronze Age in the Balkans, prosperous communities lived and had the opportunity to accumulate and express their wealth. Wealth became a standard of sustainable interactive communities, for whom trade, especially with metal, was extremely important. The metal industry developed on numerous sites, and the mining of copper was one of the integrative factors, along with placer gold. It is still unclear how important Ada gold mining was for Prehistory. It seems, however, that the Carpathians gradually developed as the leading mining copper source, and the later Early Bronze societies continued to flourish in this region. Meanwhile, south of the Balkans, the presumed process is a community transformation toward stockbreeding as characterized in the later Bronze Age in 2nd millennium cal BCE.

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ПРАВИЛЬНАЯ ССЫЛКА НА СТАТЬЮ

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