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BALKAN PERSPECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIRCUMPONTIC RESEARCH DESIGN DURING THE EARLY BRONZE AGE (LATER 4TH – 3RD MILLENNIUM CAL BCE)

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Abstract

Aim. To show the decisive importance of the Early Bronze Age in the development of Eurasian civilization as a system of interconnected, interdependent and intensely interacting societies that arose during the Early Bronze Age I (late 4th millennium BCE) and flourished during the Early Bronze Age II–III (3,000 BCE). The Balkans became one of the centers of the Circumpontic cultural system, integrated during the Early Bronze Age to varying degrees with the northwest of Anatolia and the northwest of the Black Sea, as well as with Central Europe and the Aegean cultures.

Methodology. The cultural and social characteristics of the communities / chiefdoms of the Balkans of the Early Bronze Age are given from diachronic perspectives.

Results. In the early Bronze Age, a system of equal partners emerged in the Balkans, based on a common economic platform, including the chiefdoms of Ezero, Yunatsite, Sitagroi in the south, as well as the conglomeration of dispersed sedentary and semi-mobile communities of Co ofeni without a clear centralized political power on the Lower Danube, the chiefdom Vucedol, etc. The presence of an exchange of prestigious items (jewelry from Dubene-Balinov Gorum) controlled by the elite, together with the absence of archaeological traces of conflicts indicate the Early Bronze Age was a peaceful period in the Balkans.

Research implications. It was found that the standards of the chiefdoms of the Western Circumpontic region corresponded to the benchmarks of the Trojan chiefdoms, although the material markers of these standards were different.

Keywords: Early Bronze Age, Circumpontic cultural system, Balkan, Anatolia chiefdoms, Ezero, Yunatsite, Sitagroi, Co ofeni, Troy

БАЛКАНСКИЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ЦИРКУМПОНТИЙСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ В ЭПОХУ РАННЕЙ БРОНЗЫ (ПОЗДНЕЕ 4–3 ТЫСЯЧЕЛЕТИЕ ДО Н. Э.)

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Аннотация

Цель. Показать решающее значение раннего бронзового века в развитии евразийской цивилизации как системы взаимосвязанных, взаимозависимых и интенсивно взаимодействующих обществ, возникшей в период Ранней Бронзы I (позднее 4 тыс. до н. э.) и процветавшей в период Ранней Бронзы II–III (3 тыс. до н. э.). Балканы стали одним из центров циркумпонтической культурной системы, интегрированные во время раннего бронзового века в разной степени с северо-западом Анатолии и северо-западом Причерноморья, а также с Центральной Европой и культурами Эгейды.

Процедура и методы. Дана культурно-хронологическая характеристика раннебронзовых культурных вождей Балкан в диахронии.

Результаты. В раннем бронзовом веке на Балканах возникла система равноправных партнёров, основанная на общей экономической платформе, включающей вождей Эзера, Юнацита, Ситагрия на юге, а также конгломерацию рассредоточенных оседлых и полумобильных общин Коцофени без чёткой централизованной политической власти на Нижнем Дунае, вождей Вучедол и др. Наличие подконтрольного элите обмена престижными предметами (драгоценностями из Дубене-Балинова Горума) вместе с отсутствием археологических следов конфликтов свидетельствуют о том, что ранний бронзовый век был мирным периодом на Балканах.

Теоретическая и/или практическая значимость. Установлен факт, что стандарты вождей западного региона Циркумпонтики соответствовали стандартам вождей Трои, хотя материальные маркеры этих стандартов отличались.

Ключевые слова: Балканы, раннебронзовый век, Циркумпонтика, археология балканских и анатолийских вожеств, Эзеро, Юнаците, Ситагри, Коцофени, Троя

Introduction

Early Bronze Age is crucial for the development of the Eurasian civilization as a system of interrelated, interdependent and intensively interacting societies. Theoretically, one of the directions of modeling is the economic concept of the World Bronze Age system, criticized by the anthropologists of Antiquity [16]. From archaeological perspectives this mega-concept in many cases cannot embrace the diversity of the cultures, leadership and the historical processes during later 4th–3rd millennium cal BCE. The other traditional direction is the matrix of the Indo-European model of formation of Early Bronze Age ethnical map of Eurasia that has two alternatives – migration from one homeland and the interactive model of evolution. The last includes a complex of cultural and historical processes comprising the opportunity of evolution of the language as a result of interactions, a development of distinct ethno-cultural areas of formation of steady language as an ethnical and cultural marker [11].

The limitations both of the economic mega-theory and of the Indo-European research are due to their design. It is often beyond the complexity of the archaeological data and its method of selecting limited records to prove one or another theory and to construct one or another model does not reveal the past as a complex complete picture. The critical analysis of the research of both directions points to gaps and increase the need of different approaches. Last but not least, there are practically no experts both of historical linguistic and archaeology, while the collaboration of researchers of different fields makes the results a hybrid synthesis without the needed clutch of bi-experts for trustful conclusions.

Circumpontic design was founded as a study of the Circumpontic Early Bronze metallurgy and developed toward a research of the Circumpontic cultures and their interrelations [10]. The last has been analyzing these cultures as an interaction system of different societies based on open methodology that evolves with the increasing of the

archaeological data and the development of the theory of Antiquity and allows creating of frameworks of many fruitful cultural models and interpretations. Circumpontic methodology focuses neither only on the population movements nor on material culture. It attempts revealing living societies in a specific historical and cultural context and deconstructing their components in order to construct an evolution model of civilization.

In this work, an attempt is made to create a foundation of an actual Circumpontic framework on the example of the Balkans, in particular, offering a cultural anthropological framework of Yunatsite and Ezero cultures in upper Thrace (South Bulgaria).

The Balkans in the Circumpontic Early Bronze Cultural System

The Balkans became one of the centers of the Circumpontic cultural system during the Early Bronze Age integrated at different degrees with northwest Anatolia and the northwest Black Sea, but also with central Europe and the Aegean cultures. This system was founded during the Early Bronze Age I (later 4th millennium cal BCE) and flourished during Early Bronze II–III (3rd millennium cal BCE).

The recent research especially to the south of the Danube River reveals more and more data about a complex transformation of the Late Copper cultures (later 5th millennium cal BCE) to Final Copper cultures (earlier 4th millennium cal BCE) to Early Bronze I cultures (later 4th millennium cal BCE). One of the pitfalls of the past research and recent genetic research – focusing on migrations as a marker of emergence of new cultures – has been replaced by a transformation model that includes evolution of the Balkan cultures and interactions with the neighbor cultures [9; 11]. In the interaction model the migrations of different degrees are a component that does not determine the changes for granted, but requires most detailed regional analysis at different levels. Most important fact that the migrationists ignore is the demographic diversity of the Balkans and the

limitation of the territories which the Balkan stockbreeders with origin in the northwestern Black Sea occupied – Dobrudzha, certain microregions in the lower Danube and microregions in eastern upper Thrace, as well as Banat [3; 6; 9; 10; 13].

From the perspectives of Anatolia, the increased number of discovered Early Bronze Age sites near the southern shore of the Black Sea [1] allows to presume a steady communication system of the southern Circumpontic with East and West. These data and possible future discoveries may point to a considerable role of the Black Sea for the development of inner Anatolia during the Early Bronze Age based on the contacts with the southern Black Sea, similarly to the western Black Sea.

In particular, the Black Sea could be a primary factor of the distribution of the gold in Circumpontica during Bronze Age with extension – the communication route the Danube River toward central and western Europe. It is believed that the oldest gold mine was documented in the north of the Caucasus in Georgia dated from the second half of the 4th millennium cal BCE [7]. The data from Early Bronze Bulgaria are mainly from placer, although recent project concluded there was mining gold in Antiquity in upper Thrace [17], the genesis of which could be in Early Bronze Age. The increased number of gold artefacts from Bulgaria and Romania [2; 9; 15] allow defend a hypothesis that the mining technology of obtaining gold and this technology advanced developed exactly during the Early Bronze Age, through interactions and adoption of innovations and discovering of new sources. Since the Balkans, the north Anatolia and the Caucasus were at a comparable stage of economic development although the political systems stimulated diverse hierarchy of expression of wealth, the gold technology – as mining and craft economy and distribution of goods – was an integrative factor with multidirectional lines of interactions. The trade of gold could be the leading factor of the prosperity of the east, south and west Circumpontic

societies, which competed and was complimented by silver mining and trade with possible very strong center in the northern Black Sea.

The exchange of gold and silver during the Early Bronze Age can be better understood if we apply the concept of difference between commodity and wealth in Antiquity [16]. Ratnager defined the commodity as alienable, that has exchange value (an extrinsic property) accruing from the demand for it. In contrast, wealth has intrinsic value that creates a social bond or underscores a hierarchical person-to-person relationship through the exchange. The author believed that the restricted exchangeability was a critically important principle.

To determine the role of the Balkans in formation and development of the Early Bronze Circumpontic cultural-economic system, the study of the western Black Sea coast is crucial. 18 submerged settlements along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast are documented [5] focusing in Ezerovo area near Varna in the north and Sozopol – Kiten in the south. They date from 4th–3rd millennium cal BCE and show the transformation processes during the Final Copper Age and Early Bronze Age included restructuring of the economic-demographic map of the Balkans. The submerged settlements may indicate a development of the Circumpontic sea communication route along the Black Sea. Such hypothesis explains the shaping of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast as a relatively independent region with two centers – north (Ezerovo) and south (Sozopol-Kiten). However, Ezero was a powerful chiefdom in the eastern Upper Thrace, so the other equally valuable hypothesis is to believe that Sozopol-Kiten were the sea ports of Ezero culture for its trade both with North reaching even northwestern Black Sea and south – Bosphorus and the south Black Sea. Such demographic-political framework explains the similarity of the ceramics between Ezero and the pottery from the Black Sea coast (especially the popularity of the corded ware) and the generally strong interconnection

between Ezero and the northwestern Black Sea stockbreeders that occupied vast spaces of Dobrudzha. Exchange of the livestock was the primary activities of the small mobile communities descendent of the Pit Grave Culture in the northwestern Black Sea. The stockbreeders' burials show interests in jewelry from gold and silver, which became a standard in the Early Bronze Balkans, not an evidence of elite (in cases of single items). Exchange was also the main constructor of the Ezero and Yunatsite elite political, economic and cultural identity. For these reasons, incorporation of the Black Sea into the Circumpontic exchange system required settlements on the western Black Sea coast.

The opportunity of development of exchange based on complimented goods explains the facts that Early Bronze Age was a peaceful period in the Balkans. Being economically strong, the Balkans evolved as a system of equal partners including Ezero chiefdom, Yunatsite chiefdom, the Sitagroi chiefdom in the south, Coțofeni conglomeration of dispersed sedentary and semi-mobile communities without clear centralized political power in the western Lower Danube, Vičedol chiefdom, Pernik chiefdom etc. [9]. Since the exchange was controlled by the political elite, finds like the jewelry from Dubene-Balinov Gorum [12] clearly show that the standards of the western Pontic region responded to the evolution of Troy chiefdom, although the material markers of these standards were of diverse character.

Types of Societies and Their Role in Development of Early Bronze Age Cultures in the Balkans

The sedentary and semi-sedentary societies versus the mobile pastoral groups contrasted in the Balkan Early Bronze archaeological picture. The origin of the mobile stockbreeders is seen typically in the northwest Black Sea, although inside the Balkans it is difficult to reconstruct the inner dynamics of the movements of the stockbreeders and all mechanisms of interactions with the sedentary and semi-sedentary societies. Between

the Danube and the Aegean territories the areas occupied mainly by stockbreeders were limited to Dobrudzha, central north Bulgaria and microregions in northwest Bulgaria and upper Thrace [9]. However, the cultural, economic and political profile of the Balkans is determined mainly by the sedentary and the semi-sedentary societies, which were the wheel of evolution and the development of the economic and political complexity, defined as a social-political level of chiefdom.

The recent evidence confirms the chiefdom model [9] for the Balkans, especially the gold jewelry from Dubene-Balinov Gorun with analogies in Troy. Such expression of wealth paints a picture of development even of competition between the Balkans and northwest Anatolia during 3rd millennium cal BCE. In this context, it is important to remind the fact that the corded ware was not distributed in Northwest Anatolia, although it existed in on the territory of European Turkey (interrelated with Ezero culture) [1; 8] and there is a system of similarity between the northwest Anatolian and Thracian pottery. At the same time, we cannot exclude that the population factor that influenced the interactions included migration of families, strangers or small segments of communities in both directions. This factor was probably stronger in the process of formations of the Early Bronze cultures. For example, Balkan elements in the Ikiztepe cemetery including ochre where at least 9 individuals (mainly males) are considered strangers [18]. At the same time, the urn burials at Yunatsite tell have analogies in northwest Anatolia (cp. 8 who connects the Anatolian cremation with the Balkans). Such data may indicate that especially about the mid of the 4th millennium cal BCE western Circumpontica was involved in a multidirectional movement of people not only coming from the northwest Black Sea to the Balkans (Pit Grave Culture), but also from Anatolia to the Balkans and from Central Europe to the Balkans and vice versa. This demographic reshaping started during the Final Copper Age as an integrative and transformation process that also involved the

Balkan population, which was descendants of the flourishing Late Copper Age cultures. The Balkans region became a stabilized demographic and economic system toward the end of Early Bronze I when the social evolution towards chiefdoms began that flourished during Early Bronze II–III.

Corded technique of incrustation was transformed in the basin of Stryama valley (Yunatsite culture) into false-corded technique, used together with other techniques of white incrustation. From perspectives of Anatolia, either the corded and false-corded techniques looked primitive to the northwest Anatolian pottery makers who applied the white incrustation using different technology, or it was a marker of cultural identity. In such case, it can be presumed that Anatolian ideological power looked at the Balkans as a periphery and allowed only impact from Anatolia to the Balkans. This peculiarity opens a gap in the theory of A. Bauer of a formation of Circumpontic coastal ceramic style [4], having in mind also that the illustrated sherds are typical of the Anatolian Early Bronze Age pottery. The research question is: What kind of similarity in the pottery reflect the interactions between distant communities and how does the pottery reflect the social and political structures in Antiquity?

An example are the pointed bottom cups from Yunatsite culture, which were not distributed in Ezero culture as a standard although both cultures are neighbors, without natural barriers. Such diagnostic differences can be applied to the political model of the chiefdoms with the increased role of formation and reproduction of a strong cultural identity. Although without geographical barriers, Yunatsite and Ezero cultures developed as distinct political societies with peculiarities of cultural evolution and changes. Common Balkan-Anatolian standards were followed in the ceramic production, although there were specific components of demonstrating strong regional cultural identities.

However, while Ezero was closer to Troy, the Yunatsite chiefdom had very strong relations with the south cultures using Sitagro

as an economic and eventually political partner, with opportunity of development of the Sea contacts in the northeast Aegean. Such political and economic structure in upper Thrace was attractive for the stockbreeders from northwest Bulgaria. As the archaeological map of the microregion Radnevo (Ezero culture) shows, moving seasonally (in winter) or migrating and integrating with Ezero population was one of the successful strategies of the stockbreeders to respond to the high economic and cultural standards of the Early Bronze Balkans and to contribute to these standards. It is very well demonstrated in the Goran-Slatina society of stockbreeders in central northern Bulgaria with numerous graves in which were adornments. The jewelry became a standard of stable economic status and as a general marker of the prosperities of the cultures of the Circumpontic system during the 3rd millennium cal BCE.

Other important characteristic is the role of rivers in the expansion and stability of the Circumpontic region. Such river in the Balkans was the Danube that allows the interactions to develop as far as Central Europe. Nevertheless, other communication river routes also existed. Yunatsite society in western upper Thrace again provides a good example to construct hypothetical models. The population of the Yunatsite chiefdom developed at least into three strong subregions – Plovdiv, Karlovo and Pazardzhik (after the main contemporary cities). Maritsa River was the water communication route that passed through Ezero culture down to the Aegean. It can be presumed that beyond the river communication, there were also dirt roads or well-known tracks that connected the villages and allowed constant narrow interactions between the villagers. Beyond economic reasons, the population inter-village communication was stimulated by feasting and inter-village marriages that in turn developed a strong cultural identity of the opposition «we–they» and increased the competitions between the chiefdoms.

The competition between the Yunatsite and Ezero chiefdoms and the willing of Ezero

to keep strong connections both with northwest Anatolia and eastern Danube basin created a problem for the ambitious Yunatsite chiefdom, so it seems the trade via Maritsa was at the expenses of paying a sort of taxes to Ezero. Both chiefdoms competed not only regarding the partners but also regarding the goods they exported – presumably wine and metal resources in particular. This situation may also explain the strong contacts between Yunatsite and Coțofeni culture despite the Stara Planina barrier. The central site of Yunatsite culture – the fortress of Plovdiv-Nebet Tepe, overlooked the Maritsa River that allows believe the existence of close to Nebet Tepe a river port. From Plovdiv the boats or primitive ships sailed up to Pazardzhik to serve the needs of the Yunatsite society living on the Yunatsite tell and the other Early Bronze villages from this microregion. The other river communication route was the Stryama River connecting the Maritsa basin with the Karlovo microregion where the central place was Dubene-Sarovka. The flange axe of lead bronze from Dubene-Sarovka connects two technologies – the central European (the shape) and the Aegean (the metal). Having in mind the axe was probably of local production, lead seems to be a traded good coming from the northern Aegean. However, there are missing specialized studies of the metallurgical *chaone opūratoire* (i. e. extraction, refinement, object manufacture) practices in the different micro-regions of the Balkans and the interpretations are based mainly on the found artefacts and molds.

Conclusion

The original concept of E. Chernych of the Circumpontic metallurgical system has evolved toward researching the region as a cultural system of interrelated and interacted societies. For the time being, there are not very strong arguments to believe that the Black Sea was a crucial factor in this cultural system as a sea for an intensive transport of resources / goods and people. A. Bauer's case study of the habits of coastal fishers [4], however, is of a serious research interest since

the described dynamics of fishing may have made fishers mediators of exchange of goods other than fish, especially of metals. The scale of this sea exchange did not require big ships since the boats could provide the needed means of transportation. The indecisive concept about sea navigation during Early Bronze Age [14] is partially due to the fact that there are missing comparative studies that use indirect evidence which may help to build constructive hypotheses.

On its side, the research design of this work attempts to paint a picture of Balkan Early Bronze Age as an incorporated powerful subsystem of Circumpontica. The Balkans stimulated the progress of the western Europe during later 3rd millennium cal BCE. The reproduced migration matrix with old or new data for this period in the Balkans in fact fades the real historical process in order to be able not to reveal but to impose flatten model of replacement of population and to build the language I.-E. map, which neither reflects the real archaeological data nor has own linguistic arguments that look strong enough for serious considerations.

The Early Bronze Age societies in the Balkans were interrelated and at similar degree of development. Their subsistence was grounded in the excellent geographic conditions for agriculture, stockbreeding, fishing and mining of metal ores, while the prosperity depended on the exchange economy, which requires close and long distant contacts. To the south of the Danube, the stockbreeders offered livestock to Ezero and Yunatsite, while the chiefdoms presumably exchanged metal recourses, wine and luxury

products. Their special interest was close relationships with Troy and the northern Aegean. An argument of the development of the Circumpontic communication routes along the Black Sea are eventually the submerged settlements along the western Black sea coast. The peculiarities of the river maps in Upper Thrace explain why for Yunatsite chiefdom was difficult the direct trade with northwest Anatolia and the Aegean. It also allows focus on the existed powerful resources for exchange that explained its prosperity during the Early Bronze Age. The sites like Dubene show that they could have been central places in fact of the elite and semi-mobile families stockbreeders who explored the Stara Planina pastures. Then, they did not depend on import of meat, milk and wool, in particular. This fact in turn explains the absence of strong traces of mobile stockbreeders, descendant of the Pit Grave Culture in the northwest Black Sea.

The offered research design is a framework that interconnects archaeology with the cultural geography, cultural anthropology and economic-political evolutionary science. Since this direction of development of the anthropology of the Circumpontic region is unequally presented for the different regions of Circumpontica, further case studies and thematic approaches may enrich and update the design to be tested against the migrations and I.-E. linguistic inquiries. It may also stimulate directions of research to find more evidence about the Black Sea as a trade route during the Early Bronze Age.

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ПРАВИЛЬНАЯ ССЫЛКА НА СТАТЬЮ

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