













Radu BĂJENARU

Identități culturale, structuri de putere și conflict militar în nordul Peninsulei Balcanice în mileniile IV-III a. Chr.



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române













OIPOSDRU

Radu BĂJENARU

IDENTITĂȚI CULTURALE, STRUCTURI DE PUTERE ȘI CONFLICT MILITAR ÎN NORDUL PENINSULEI BALCANICE ÎN MILENIILE IV-III A. CHR.



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Lucrare realizată în cadrul proiectului "Valorificarea identităților culturale în procesele globale", cofinanțat din Fondul Social European prin Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007 – 2013, contractul de finanțare nr. POSDRU/89/1.5/S/59758.

Titlurile și drepturile de proprietate intelectuală și industrială asupra rezultatelor obținute în cadrul stagiului de cercetare postdoctorală aparțin Academiei Române.

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ISBN 978-973-167-118-5 Depozit legal: Trim. II 2013

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Colecția AULA MAGNA













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Titlul proiectului: "Valorificarea identităților culturale în procesele globale"

Contract: POSDRU/89/1.5/S/59758 Beneficiar: ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ

Parteneri în proiect: (I) UNIVERSITATEA POLITEHNICA București, Facultatea de Mecanică și

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ADDENDA

Abstract

Cultural identities, structures of power and military conflict in northern Balkan Peninsula during 4th-3rd millennia BC

The project's theme is focused on the transition process from Chalcolithic to Bronze Age in North-Eastern Balkan Peninsula seen through metallurgical and weaponry development, considering the existence of certain 'power centres' in the respective areas. This paper represents only a first volume of a more extended series. The systematic assembly and presentation within a catalogue of those metal items which can be regarded as weapons, dating from Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age (especially axes and daggers) was the main purpose. The next volume will include discussions about these pieces typology, contexts, significance and functionality as well as about the ways of reconstructing this period's military conflicts.

It is well known that around the middle of the 4th millennium BC significant transformations in the material culture of Carphato-Balkan populations took place. In fact, these are fundamental social, ideologic and economic changes which lead to a new epoch, the Bronze Age. This paper's main purpose is defining the role and impact of military conflict within prehistoric communities by considering as study-case the process of transition from Chalcolithic to Bronze Age in the northern area of the Balkan Peninsula (4th-3rd millenniua BC).

The disappearance of Cucuteni-Tripolye, Gumelniţa-Karanovo VI or Sălcuţa-Krivodol civilisations and the emergence of new ceramic groups, "poorer" in discoveries and with a material culture which can be related to North-Pontic area offered the opportunity for different interpretations. A

widely known theory which still has many followers nowadays is the one elaborated in the 70's by Maria Gimbutas (Gimbutas 1977), resumed on several occasions. According to her, the end of prosperous Carpatho-Balkan area's Chalcolithic civilisations was due to successive stages of populations' infiltration from North-Pontic area (kurgan invasions). These were believed to have been semi-nomad pastoral populations being strongly hierarchical from the social perspective, with a pronounced war character. The image created by this approach shows tribes of warrior invaders which destroy, displace and overcome the peaceful Chalcolithic communities.

Therefore concepts like migration, violence and military conflict are often used in explaining the beginning of the Bronze Age.

Military conflict in prehistoric societies was, for a long time, approached by archaeologists like a natural, self-understood phenomenon pragmatically and empirically. It has been considered that a human community was the more violent as it was less organized from the social and political point of view.

As a consequence archaeological cultures, respectively the tribes, were moving and expanding permanently, migrating over large areas and entering in conflict with other tribes; the powerful ones survived, the weaker ones disappeared.

Only in the last decade more studies approaching the conflict theme in prehistoric societies from different perspectives started to appear. Using results and observations equally from archaeology and from other fields like sociology, ethnography, ethnology and cultural anthropology, in these studies a series of theoretical aspects regarding violence and conflict in prehistory are discussed. Nowadays this theme can be considered as a distinct research field (an overview on these research matters and on the different approaches at Otto, Thrane, Vandkilde 2006).

Considering our area, such discussions are far from being common. Two works of Maria Ivanova need to be noticed, in which she tries a reconstruction of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age weaponry and conflict in the Balkan Peninsula, the attention being brought on the settlements' fortification system (Ivanova 2006; Ivanova 2008). From

Romania I mention the volume *The weaponry and the combat or parade gear – marks of the prestige and social status in the tombs of the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Istros 16, Brăila, 2010).

Therefore, significant in our research remain Alexandru Vulpe and Henrieta Todorova's works published in the 70's and 80's in Prähistorische Bronzefunde series about prehistoric metal axes from Romania and Bulgaria (Vulpe 1970; Vulpe 1975; Todorova 1981), as well as Ivan Vajsov's study about this area's early daggers published in 1993 (Vajsov 1993) and few more recent studies concerning Early Bronze Age axes from northern Greece published by Joseph Maran (Maran 2001). I must also mention the volume on Chalcolithic copper metallurgy from Romania published by Ioan Mareş (Mareş 2002).

The following issues are to be considered in this paper:

- Is war a socio-cultural result, or is it genetically structured in human behaviour?
- What is the nature of war in prehistory, its role, social and cultural impact on the respective communities?
- How many military conflict types existed in prehistory and how can they be archaeologically identified?
- Which are those material culture aspects through which we can archaeologically establish if a human community had a propensity for war? Can we discuss of war type versus peaceful communities in prehistory?
- Which is the role of metallurgy and metal weaponry in expressing and preserving social identity and in creating certain power centres within prehistoric societies? Can we refer to a warrior "caste" in this chronological phase?
- Which is the ideological function and cultural impact of weaponry and military conflict? Can the Bronze Age from Carpatho-Balkan area be seen as a result of violent invasions of warriors originating from the North-Pontic area?

In order to reach the above mentioned objectives I take in consideration a series of various approaches with the purpose of

constructing a strong theoretical and documentary basis for the arguments, hypothesis and conclusions expressed.

The study of archaeological sources. This refers to assembling data bases that will cover all metal items considered to be weapons from the Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age in the space already mentioned. I'm referring, first of all, to their typological evolution, discovery contexts and comparison with other items respectively the changes which took place in Early Bronze Age as compared to the Chalcolithic period. Choosing a large geographical area allows also determining different regional patterns regarding the behaviour towards the various weapon types.

I will bring up the analogies topic, both typological and contextual ones, that such pieces have in more or less nearby areas.

The study of iconographical sources. Except for a few cave representations (Peştera Nucu, Peştera Magurata) there are a series of stone funerary stelae spread from North-Pontic space to Atlantic, on which images of different weapon types can be noticed. The representations from Valcamonica (northern Italy) and those from Northern Europe are extremely interesting. In this case the situations in which the respective weapons appear (people, animals, other types of pieces) are significant as they provide relevant information concerning various aspects regarding their social and cultural function. I also have in view several comparisons with the Middle and Near East military iconography, more meaningful and expressive for the period we are referring to.

The study of ethnographic sources. There are plenty of observations, reports and studies referring to various nowadays primitive populations, to the way in which inter-community conflicts are negotiated, to war's role and its social and cultural impact, to military organisation and weapons' function within these communities and last, but not least, to war's ritual character.

The study of literary sources. There are no written sources for the epoch and space we are referring to. However, various written sources might be taken into consideration in this discussion. From the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to Homer's *Iliad* there is a series of information items which are extremely useful for understanding the attitude towards conflict, weapons,

war's nature or Bronze Age warrior status, even though they are relatively far in time and space. All these, together with iconographic and ethnographic information can offer a consistent image for what the meaning of military conflict in prehistory is, with all its social and cultural aspects.

Assuring the theoretical base. Theoretical approaches on prehistoric military conflicts increased substantially. It is interesting to observe to what extent such theoretical discussions, together with ethnographic and literary information, can be applied to an explicit case, that of the human communities which inhabited the northern part of Balkan Peninsula during 4th-3rd millenniua BC.

By north-eastern part of Balkan Peninsula I mean the area between Southern and Curvature Carpathians in the North; the Iron Gates, the Balkans's western part and Struma River Valley in the West; the Aegean Sea in the South; the western shore of the Black Sea in the East. It is a space characterized by several geographical units delimited by the Carpathians, Danube's lower course, Stara Planina Mountains (Balkans) and Rhodope Mountains. All these are placed on West-East direction and divide the respective space into three main geographical units:

A. Lower Danube's basin; in this paper I'm referring only to the area from Southern Carpathians to the Balkans and from the Iron Gates to the Danube Delta. Geographically, this area is very diverse starting with the peaks of the Carpathians and Balkans over 2000 meters high to the Danube's meadow. In the same time, the relief gradually decreases from West to East when approaching the Black Sea.

B. Thrace, situated between The Balkans and The Rhodope Mountains, delimited in the western part by Rila massif and in the eastern part by the Black Sea. It appears like a vast plain area which widens to the South-East when approaching the Black Sea shore; in the south-eastern part, Thrace spreads to Aegean Sea having the western border on Nestos (Mesta).

C. Eastern Macedonia is the land placed between the Rhodope Mountains and the Aegean Sea, bordered in the western part by Struma and in the eastern part by Nestos. The relief decreases from North to South towards the Aegean Sea. Although the area between Nestos, Evros and the Rhodope Mountains was traditionally integrated in Thrace, geographically it is rather closer to eastern Macedonia. Thasos and Samothrace Islands are also considered as belonging to Macedonia and Thrace.

Obviously, each of these regions can be subdivided in several geographical units but without micro regional multidisciplinary researches it is not possible to discuss how the natural environment influenced the cultural development of prehistoric communities. It can be noticed that although the four main geographical units (the Carpathians, the Danube, the Balkans and the Rhodope Mountains) are East-West oriented, the hydrographic network is generally oriented North-South / South-North. The main watercourses in the northern Danube area are Jiu River, Olt River, Argeş River, Ialomița River and Buzău River, all of them springing from the Carpathians and flowing directly into the Danube (except for Buzău River). A similar situation can be noticed South of the Danube as well: Ogosta River, Iskar River, Osam River and Yantra River have South-North orientation, from the Balkans towards the Danube. The rivers from Macedonia and Thrace have also a North-South general orientation, mainly Struma and Mesta. Maritsa, after crossing the Thracian plain from West to East, when joining Tundzha course has a North-South orientation, flowing into the Aegean Sea.

Taking into consideration that in prehistory the main communication routes were along watercourses, the hydrographic network orientation facilitated, first of all, the South-North contacts (and vice versa). This fact may be observed best in the Chalcolithic period, when almost the entire area outlined above is archaeologically characterised by two main cultural complexes: Gumelniţa-Karanovo VI and Sălcuţa-Krivodol. The first one occupies the Lower Danube area's eastern half (with a border on Olt River – Osam River line approximately) and most of Thrace, while Sălcuţa-Krivodol spreads in the western half and Struma Valley, almost towards Macedonia.

Things change during the next period, in the Early Bronze Age. The majority of the Early Bronze Age cultural groups have their spreading area either until the Danube or, most likely, until the Balkans (Cernavoda III,

Coţofeni, Glina, Mihalich, Yunatsite or Sveti Kirilovo) even though Yamnaya phenomenon can be observed both at the Lower Danube and Thrace, until Maritsa River. The main difference between the Lower Danube area, on the one hand, and Thrace and Macedonia, on the other hand, is *tell* type settlements disappearance in the northern part of the Balkans, while in the southern part they continue to be present for at least another one and a half millennium. The best known examples are Yunatsite, Ezero and Kırklareli in Thrace, Sitagroi and Dikili Tash in Macedonia.

The present paper's chronological frame starts, generally, from the beginning of the 5th millennium BC until the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, that is from the emergence of Boian-Gumelniţa-Karanovo V-VI and Sălcuţa-Gradeshnitsa-Krivodol cultural complexes until the tells from Thrace and Macedonia cease to be inhabited (Ezero, Yunatsite, Sitagroi) and the appearance of Middle Bronze Age cultures in the Lower Danube area (Verbicioara, Tei, Monteoru). We are referring to an extensive period, characterized by a lot of controversial cultural phenomena which were interpreted in many ways over the time. This period is also a chronological interval divided in several epochs differently seen and understood in the archaeological literature. The most frequently used terms in defining this period are: Chalcolithic (Eneolithic), Copper Age, transitional period to Bronze Age and Early Bronze Age.

Sometime around the beginning of the 5th millennium two considerable phenomena mark the Chalcolithic emergence in the discussed space: the appearance of *tell* type settlements in the Lower Danube area and the appearance of the first copper "heavy pieces" in the space between the Carpathians and the Balkans, simultaneously with the crystallization of the two above mentioned complexes. Absolute chronology data place the start of Gumelniţa-Karanovo VI culture around the middle of the 5th millennium BC (Görsdorf, Bojadžiev 1996; Bem 2001). The new data from Varna cemetery tend to place this beginning a few centuries before (Higham et al. 2008).

Towards the beginning of the 4th millennium BC the ceasing of the inhabitancy within Lower Danube *tell* type settlements, simultaneously with a considerable change of the material culture, in all its aspects, can be

noticed (Todorova 2007). New ceramic groups appear (Cernavoda I, Brăteşti, Sălcuța IV-Herculane, Pevec, Galatin, Yagodina etc) during a period considered either final Eneolithic, or transitional period to Bronze Age (from among the many studies regarding this issue, I mention Roman 1971 and Todorova 1993).

In Bulgarian archaeological literature it is commonly accepted that the Bronze Age starts with the beginning of Cernavoda III ceramic group in the Lower Danube, around the middle of the 4th millennium. I recently expressed a similar opinion regarding the northern Danube area (Băjenaru 2010, with a presentation of the main opinions encountered in Romanian archaeological literature). However, in the second half of the 4th millennium BC and in the first centuries of the 3rd millennium BC, the following facts are certain: Coţofeni culture evolves in the western part of the Lower Danube, while in the eastern part cultural groups such as Cernavoda II-Ezerovo appear, which have correspondences in 13th to 9th levels from Ezero tell and 17th to 14th levels from Yunatsite tell in Thrace, in 2nd Radomir level in the Upper Struma basin, as well as in Sitagroi IV and Dikili Tash IIIA phases from Macedonia.

First Yamnaya barrow graves appear also in this period at the Lower Danube and Thrace. This period is usually considered as the first stage of Early Bronze Age (an useful synthesis regarding the Early Bronze Age in both absolute and relative chronology in the discussed area, with the respective bibliography, at Nikolova 1999, 175 and next; regarding Yamnaya phenomenon at the Lower Danube, more recent Motzoi-Chicideanu 2011, 224 next and Alexandrov 2012).

The second Early Bronze Age stage can be dated approximately between 2700-2400 BC; At the Lower Danube sites characteristic to Glina culture are attested, in the eastern part of the area the Yamnaya phenomenon continues, in Thrace is the period of 8th-9th Ezero levels and 13th-7th Yunatsite levels and in Macedonia we talk about Sitagroi Va phase. Concluding, in the third Early Bronze Age phase (around 2400-2100/2000 BC) we may notice the presence of ceramic groups such as Odaia Turcului (Monteoru Ic4) or Gornea-Orleşti at the Lower Danube, corresponding to Sveti Kirilovo (Ezero 3-1 levels), 6th to 1st levels from Yunatsite in Thrace,

and to Sitagroi Vb phase from Macedonia (for all these phases, see also Nikolova 1999, with slightly different chronological propositions from the ones suggested here).

The above presented cultural and chronological outline has a first objective to highlight the main cultural phenomena identified in north eastern Balkan Peninsula during 5th-3rd millennia, their dynamics and, last but not least, the period's cultural diversity. One aspect which can offer a unity image to this space is the metallurgy and the metal pieces which were produced and used in this area.

The approximately 784 items from the catalogue come from 352 places. They are spread relatively uniform in the researched space, although I must mention their lack in eastern Macedonia and Greek Thrace, as well as their reduced number in south-eastern Thrace, in the Turkish part. The possibility that this absence may be due to certain gaps in my documentation is not excluded, especially since similar items with the ones discussed can be noticed in the immediate western part of Struma River (in Chalkidiki and more south – Maran 2001). Regarding the pieces spreading area, a certain differentiation may be observed concerning Eneolithic hammer axes and the axe-adzes. The last mentioned type appears especially in the western half (Sălcuța-Krivodol cultural complex spreading area) and the hammer type is noticed particularly in the eastern half (Gumelnița-Karanovo VI spreading area). Even though it may be possible, my opinion is that this differentiation is not due to chronological breaks between the two axe types, but may have other causes explained through certain traditions and significations. Meaningful is the fact that the majority of the hammer axes come from Varna culture area, otherwise this being the only area where such pieces can be found in graves.

Regarding the contexts, we notice a rather big diversity. A consistent percentage comes from settlements, cemeteries or can be related to certain sites, which allows a precise cultural and chronological designation. Most of them are, however, found randomly and isolated. The context doesn't indicate, otherwise, the period when such a piece was produced and used. The hammer axe from Coţofenii din Dos found in a Latène context is an expressive, although extreme example (catalogue number 137). It is also the

reason for including in our catalogue axes and daggers which usually would be dated in later Bronze Age phases. At a first sight certain differences regarding Chalcolithic pieces contexts compared with the Bronze Age ones can be noticed, meaning a higher presence of the Chalcolithic pieces in graves and settlements.

Shaft-hole axes attributed to Pădureni and Balşa types are usually related to Middle Bronze Age cultural groups. There are a series of pieces and moulds found in such contexts, especially in Transylvania, sustaining this argument. I included them in the catalogue because of the axe found at Yunatsite tell (catalogue number 778). Considering the butt's shape (prolonged, with a flattened button) and the shaft, on the one hand, it is typologically very similar to several pieces attributed to Pădureni and Balşa type. On the other hand, the Yunatsite piece comes from a relatively clear Early Bronze Age context, which can be dated not later than the middle of the 3rd millennium BC.

Even though earlier types of axes (Baniabic and Corbasca) have a very large spreading area, from the Caucasus until Central Europe and the Rhodope Mountains we notice that later types, namely Pătulele and Pădureni (the prolonged button butt) are concentrated in the discussed area (to which we may add south eastern Transylvania - upper Olt River basin).

Another observation is the presence of singular pieces such those from Haskovo hoard: a Remedello type dagger (catalogue number 262), a flat axe, typologically similar to a series of axes from Central Anatolia (catalogue number 260) and an "epsilon" axe, characteristic for Middle and Near East (catalogue number 261). Taking into account the Haskovo hoard specifics (it has been recovered from treasure hunters), it is very likely that the pieces come from international antiquities commerce and not from the Bulgarian territory.

Last, an important and very discussed issue within the archaeological literature is that of these pieces' functionality. Opinions are of course, various, from tools and ingots to weapons and prestige goods. In a recent article I explored the possibility that daggers might have been used, during the discussed epochs, as animal cutting and sacrifice

instruments (Băjenaru, Popescu 2012). A considerable part of these axes are unfinished or don't have traces of use, so that it is reasonable to interpret them as prestige goods, even more so that in the mentioned epoch and space archaeological discoveries don't allow us to identify any patterns regarding warriors' military equipment.

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Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române CNCS PN - II - ACRED - ED - 2012 – 0374

Coperta colecției: AULA MAGNA

Machetare, tehnoredactare și prezentare grafică: Ortansa CIUTACU, Nicolae LOGIN Logistică editorială și diseminare: Ovidiu SÎRBU, Radu AMAN

Traducerea sumarului și sintezei, corectură și bun de tipar asigurate de autor

ISBN 978-973-167-118-5

Apărut trim. II 2013