

Bronze Age gold torques from Bulgaria (Abstract)

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The present article discusses six of a total of 12 gold torques from the Bronze Age, discovered in Bulgaria (the remaining golden torques belong to the hoard from Svishtov that was discovered in August 2011 and will be discussed in a separate publication). All torques are stray finds from the following regions: 1. Novae/Svishtov, Veliko Tarnovo region; 2. Veliko Tarnovo; 3. Shumen, Eldaz Tabiya locality; 4. Bogdanovo, Dobrich region; 5. Anchialo/Pomorie, Burgas region; 6. Unknown provenance. The torques are divided into two groups according to the shape of the 'ears', an element that most certainly was not damaged with time: I. torques with 'flattened ears', and II. torques with 'coiled ears and additional twisting of the wire around the torque.

The earliest example from Group I is the copper torque from Grave No. 4 in Decea Mureşului cemetery in Transylvania, dated to the end of the Copper Age. Torques with 'flattened ears' are also known from the Late Baden Culture, but became very popular in the second half of third millennium BC. Parallels for the torque from Novae are found in the Southeastern Mediterranean: Byblos (Lebanon) – three gold torques from the so-called Depot d'offrandes aux bracelets from Level XXII, and four silver torques from the so-called Depot d'offrandes aux ors from Level XVI; the hoard in the so-called Montet jar with 41 bronze torques and three of silver. The chronology of the finds spans the period from 2130 to 2040 BC (Tufnell, Ward 1966) or no earlier than 2000 BC (Harding 1984); Ras Shamra/Ugarit (Syria) – torques, attributed to the periods Ugarit Moyen I and Ugarit Moyen II, or more generally to the beginning of the second millennium BC (Schaeffer 1948); Qalaat-er-Rouss (Schaeffer 1948) and other grave

contexts and hoards from Syria, dated to the same period. Parallels are adduced of bronze statuettes wearing torques, found in Syria and Israel, as well as isolated parallels from Mesopotamia – Ur (Iraq), Umm-el-Marra (Syria), and Egypt.

In Central and Southeast Europe, there is only one torque from Group I, made of precious metal - it belongs to Únětice Culture at Dieskau (Germany), dated to the period Br. A2 (Gerloff 1993). Identical bronze/copper torques are known from Muntenia - Cetățeni din Deal, related to the Cistgrave Horizon (Schuster 1997) and Monteoru Culture Ic3/c2 - IIB; in absolute dates, this corresponds to 2200 - 1700/1600 BC (Motzoi-Chicideanu, Gugiu 2002). Parallels from the eastern part of the Middle Danube basin are found mainly in the necropoleis near Mokrin and Novi Kneževac, Banat, dated to the Br A1/A2 period (Girić 1971, 1984), while a Late Bronze Age date is also suggested for this group of torques in Central and Western Serbia (Br. B-D), and as late as Ha A1/A2 period for Banat (Vasić 2010). In Central Europe after the Baden Culture, there are parallels from Br. A1 period: Únětice Culture – the find from Kyhna, Saxony (Gerloff, 1993), all EBA groups in South Germany and Austria (Lißner, 2004; Schubert, 1973); Hatvan, Hurbanovo, and Madarovce cultures in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Novotna, 1984), as well as from the Br I-II period in Hungary (Bóna, 1975; Mozsolics, 1967).

To conclude the discussion of the chronological position of this group, it is pointed out that most torques in Europe are dated to the late third millennium - early second millennium BC, and all but one are made of bronze/copper. On the other hand, precious metal torques from this group are typical of the Levant in the first centuries of the second millennium BC. The

discussion supports the suggestion that the torque from Novae dates to the end of the third millennium or the first half of the second millennium BC.

Group II. Characteristic for this group is that the torques are made of thinner (0.3-0.4 cm) wire as compared to Group I, and have a larger diameter - 10 to 13-14 cm. Parallels are discussed with a gold torque from Ikiztepe in the central part of the Southern Black Sea area, dated to 2400-2100 BC (Bilgi, 2001), as well as examples from closed complexes from the Wieselburg and Únětice Cultures in Central Europe, dated to the Middle Bronze Age (Schubert 1973; Neugebauer 1994), and from the southern parts of the Czech Republic, dated to the Early Bronze Age (Mouha 2007). In order to clarify the chronological position of the torques, parallels of the earrings associated with this group of torques are also discussed. Such earrings are found again in Ikiztepe,

dated to 2400-2100 BC (Bilgi 2001), as well as in the Burton Y. Berry Collection, dated generally to the Anatolian Early Bronze Age (Rudolf, 1995). Having in mind the parallels of the torques and the associated earrings, a date in the last quarter of the third millennium BC is suggested for this group, while the beginning of the second millennium BC cannot be excluded.

In conclusion, Bronze Age cultural and trade links are discussed of the eastern parts of the Northern Balkans with Central Europe and the Aegean-Anatolian world. It is suggested that the above-discussed finds and other, still unpublished similar precious metal items from the region could mark a new route, probably commercial, between Transylvania and its rich golden sources and Northwestern Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean from the turn of the second millennium to at least 1500 BC.