

Late Chalcolithic ritual structure on Kaleto hill in Mezdra (Abstract)
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Kaleto locality is situated on a rocky ridge at c.230 m above sea level in the southwestern end of the town of Mezdra, on the left bank of the river Iskar. The hill offers natural protection and has a strategic position at the intersection of main roads that have been used since ancient times to the present. A prehistoric settlement is situated there, occupying 2750 square meters. On the surface, stone walls could be seen from the Roman, Late Antique, and Medieval fortress, some of them preserved up to a height of six meters.

Archaeological investigations between 2003 and 2008 revealed two Late Chalcolithic layers, belonging to the second and third stages of Krivodol-Sălcuța-Bubani cultural complex (late 5th millennium BC). In the end of the 5th millennium BC, the Late Chalcolithic settlement was destroyed by a devastating attack.

In 2008, in a trench in the central part of the site, a prehistoric structure was discovered lying on the limestone bedrock. In the structure, two aurochs skulls were discovered placed side by side in a man-made groove with north-south orientation. Behind the back of the skulls, there was a vertically placed smoothed flat river stone, shaped as bull's head. The aurochs' skulls and the stone sculpture were covered with

split stones, forming a “stone mantle”, and were plastered with burnt clay.

The materials and the pottery indicate that the “aurochs' sanctuary” was created in the beginning of the habitation of the rocky ridge in the end of the Chalcolithic Period and was meant to be a construction sacrifice for ensuring fertility and continuation of the clan.

Some similarities could be observed with prehistoric cult structures and sites with bucrania in Asia Minor and the Balkans. These similarities illustrate the wide propagation of the cult of the Bull in Neolithic and Chalcolithic times, related to deposition of bulls' skulls and bucrania. However, the comparative analysis reveals an essential specific of the “aurochs' sanctuary” at Mezdra that sets it apart from the discussed parallels. This is the deposition, in certain order, of two heads of the largest possible aurochs on an already treated rock base and their sealing with stone mantle, plastered with clay.

A topographic continuity of religious sites of different periods is observed at Mezdra-Kaleto. At the same place, which is actually the geographic centre of the rocky ridge, an early Thracian ritual structure existed in 7th-6th c. BC. In 3rd c. AD, a pagan sanctuary emerged that later evolved into a temple.