

Early Bronze Age tumulus cemetery at Dabene, near Karlovo (preliminary report)

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In 2004 and 2005 five tumuli were excavated, four of them low and flat. They had a stone cover up to 30 cm deep; their maximal diameter was 9.95 m. Pottery vessels, small human bone fragments, numerous golden ornaments - spirals, convex appliquéés, biconical and pyramid-shaped beads, miniature elements from necklaces and their separators, adze-shaped artifacts - and in one of the cases a bronze knife and a whetstone, were deposited in the center of the tumuli. The pottery assemblage consists of jugs, bowls and Yunatsite-type cups. The low tumuli date back to the third phase of the early Bronze Age (EBA) in Thrace. They yielded cremation burials, which is a new phenomenon for this period of the EBA in Thrace. The finds from Tumulus № 3 enable a reconstruction of two separate necklaces, consisting of beads and separators of various types and sizes.

One of the five large tumuli, 2.70 m high and 25 m in diameter, was also excavated. A bow-shaped structure made of river stones and destroyed as early as the EBA was unearthed on the ancient ground level. It was covered by layers of soil and stones. A rectangular pit, 80 cm deep and northwest-southeast oriented, was dug into the northern part of the tumulus. Three pottery vessels - a bowl and two jugs - were deposited on the bottom of the pit. A dorsally extended skeleton of an adult male with his head to the west/southwest was found in a rectangular grave pit to the south of the vessels. 12 golden artifacts were unearthed to the north of the skeleton. They were covered by the earlier stone cover of the tumulus, which have not extended on its entire area. It was disturbed by a grave pit, in which a baby or a small child has been buried. The stone layer was covered by a layer of soil followed by a second, later stone cover extending on the entire area of the tumulus.

A trench was made to the north of this tumulus. Structures were unearthed there, partially preserved in situ and made of river stones, as well as sherds, Yunatsite-type cups and animal bones. They date back to the same period as the small and large tumuli; therefore they can be

considered part of the same assemblage.

The pottery vessels' shapes and decoration refer the excavated tumuli to the third phase of the EBA in Thrace.

It is for the second time that a bi-ritual EBA cemetery is found in Bulgaria, and the cremation burial is a new phenomenon for to the third phase of the EBA in Thrace. Since no traces of fire were recorded the cremation of the bodies must had been done at another place.

The numerous golden artifacts yielded by the five excavated tumuli have parallels in earlier as well as later assemblages on a territory extending from Asia Minor (Troy, Polyochni, Levkas, etc.) to Middle Europe (Mokrin, Leki Male, Franzhausen I, Velika Vrbica, etc.). I was not able to find parallels of some of the artifacts such as the separators, the adze-shaped artifacts, the casing, the end-piece, some of the spirals and some of the appliquéés.

As far as technology is concerned, some of the artifacts or their elements prove the high level of gold jewelry workmanship and of the various techniques related to it in the EBA.

The concentration of such large amount of gold artifacts and jewelry elements in several tumuli of the same cemetery suggests that they were probably produced in a place close to the settlement and the cemetery. The gold-bearing tributaries of the Stryama River are circumstantial evidence for this thesis.

The appearance of certain golden artifact-types in Thracian EBA III was probably due to the influence or direct trade contacts with Asia Minor to the southeast and the Northern Aegean to the south in EBA II-III or the beginning of EBA III. These new shapes' appearance was probably the result of further development of the gold jewelry tradition. In the EBA III, this part of Bulgaria influenced the areas to the north and especially to the northwest; e.g. the so-called Noppenringe and the convex appliquéés introduced along the Middle Danube in the middle Bronze Age. This turned the Central Balkans into a link between Asia Minor and Europe in the EBA.