

Early Byzantine hoard of iron tools and artifacts from Odartsi, near Dobrich

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A hoard of iron tools and everyday life articles was unearthed in 1979 by the Bulgarian-Polish team excavating at the site of Gradishteto, near Odartsi, Dobrich region. The find consists of 19 artifacts (figs. 1, 2): a ploughshare, 4 hoes, 2 mattocks, 4 scythes, 3 sickles, pruning hook, axe, adze, fire chain and a buckle. The tools form the major part of the hoard - farming tools and tools related to wood working - and display some of the most common early Byzantine types. The context of the find suggests a relation to the big fire, which destroyed the settlement in the last phase of the early Byzantine period. The numismatic evidence dates the event to the end of the first or the beginning of the second decade of the 7th century AD, probably during the invasion of Slavs and Avars in 615 AD. It could be assumed that it was the time when the hoard was buried and therefore it belongs to the group of the assemblages with reliable dating.

The publication of Roman tools as well as the research on such finds from Bulgaria formed a firm base for further analysis. The intentional burial of assemblage of artifacts (hoard) in an emergency could be regarded a combination of virtue concepts, an expression of a socio-economic reality, technical facts and, of course, a matter of accidental circumstances. Such approach should differentiate between hoards buried by their owners and the result of plunder as well as collective finds comprising metal artifacts, which are different in material and function. The essential point in this case is to regard the buried hoards as transient reflection in the archaeological context of a meaningful entity of objects, which have functioned in a particular environment and in certain historical period of time. This perspective for their study is aimed beyond the standard primary level of the formal and typological analysis and turns the hoards, at least in theory, in an original source for the reconstruction of the social and economic aspects of the period.

The hoard from Odartsi and the other hoards briefly presented in this article - from Zikideva (fig. 4), Tsoida (fig. 5), Ratiaria region (fig. 6), Novakovo (fig. 7), Beroe (fig. 8), Krakra hill (fig. 9), Markovo (fig. 10) and Voivoda - have similar dating (mid 5th to the late 6th century AD), composition and typological features of the particular tools. The comparative analysis of the hoards raises the questions about the interpretation of the recorded combinations of objects, their integrative or, on the contrary, separate functions, the relation of the concealers to the hoard and their identification.

The hoards buried by the owners of the artifacts (Zikideva, Odartsi, Tsoida, Beroe, Krakra, Markovo) could be interpreted as a possession of small or relatively bigger independent households. Their basic economic activity was mainly related to the farming and less to other activities (wood working, home-crafts, etc.) but it does not seem very likely that they exceeded the frames of the home production. Their relation to the defense or probable participation in the military activities is suggested by the presence of weapons in the hoards.

The hoards buried by plunderers in the time of the barbaric invasions (the hoards from Ratiaria region and Voivoda) differ from the hoards described above. The objects in them lack functional entity. The accidental circumstances played the leading role in the formation of these heterogeneous finds. Notwithstanding by whom, why and with what intention these hoards had been buried, they display comparatively similar range of tools and objects. Therefore the archaeological evidence reflects a similarity of the ideas of both the population inhabiting the territories to the south of the Danube and the various ethnic groups invading and plundering the provinces from the 5th to 7th century AD, a fact which is a part of the general processes of ethnic, social, cultural and historical transformation at the end of the early Byzantine period.