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Early Bronze Age ceramic jug in the collection of Burgas Museum of Archaeology (Abstract)

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The present article discusses a ceramic jug in the collection of Burgas Regional Museum of History. In the 1960s it was given to Prof. Ivan Galabov and inventoried under No. 1271 as an artifact of unknown provenance. Despite the lack of context, the vase is of great interest and its presence in the area of the west coast of the Black Sea raises questions that will be considered here. Half a century has passed since the discovery and the delivery of the find. The hypothesis that jug

was found somewhere in the Asiatic territories of present-day Turkey and was brought to Bulgaria in modern times could be dismissed. Artifacts with compromised context of discovery, related to the international black market of antiquities and entering the collections of museums in Bulgaria, became a phenomenon that hinders the analysis of the finds' provenance and interpretation only in the last 20 years.

The jug from Burgas has been commented in

several earlier summarizing publications, where it was attributed to the Early Iron Age. In the author's opinion, there are sufficient typological and morphological grounds for a considerably earlier date, raising additional questions regarding its provenance.

The jug is 26 cm high at the handle, with diameter of the mouth 9 cm, maximum diameter of the body 19.2 cm, and diameter of the base 8 cm (Fig. 1-2). It is made of refined clay with very fine admixtures of quartz grains and white particles, up to 0.1-0.3 cm. The cross section is of homogeneous dark gray colour. The surface is smoothed, of matt light brown colour. On the body, there are large stains that resulted from secondary firing.

The vase is of elegant shape. The lip is out-turned, with the rim broken off, except for a small part, where the handle is attached. It is vertical, of rectangular section, with the lower end attached on the wall between the neck and the body. Beneath the mouth the neck is conical, connected to the body by means of an emphasized transition. The body is spherical and rests on a low disc-like foot.

The jug has rich decoration. There are ten horizontal flutes (each one 1 cm wide) on the neck; originally, there were probably more, but it remains unclear due to the broken mouth. The fluting forms a horizontal band, limited at both ends with vertical grooves. The surface of the body is covered with horizontal triple zigzag lines, composing a uniform two-tier composition. The upper tier is composed of elements of uniform dimensions (3-4 cm), relatively equally spaced. The decoration is executed by means of deep incisions. The upper ornamental field is separated from the lower by means of three horizontal incised lines. The lower tier of the composition is similar to the upper, but consists of more elements of smaller dimensions (up to 2 cm), densely covering this part of the vessel's body.

The main task of the present study is to find exact parallels of the jug from Burgas, to define its date and its probable provenance. There are no similar vases from present-day Bulgaria, neither in major centers, such as Ezero, Yunatsite, and Galabovo, nor in the Early Bronze Age settlements in the area of Burgas – Atiya, Sozopol, Urdoviza. The parallels of the jug are to be found in Central and West Anatolia, on sites from the end of the second and the beginning of the third phase of the Early Bronze Age. Among them are the metal and ceramic vases from Beycesultan,

Bakla Tepe, Mahmatlar, Aphrodisias, Rivari (on Milos), Demircihöyük, etc. All adduced parallels (with one exception) belong to the group of luxury tableware. They illustrate one common shape across very large territory, with similar ornamental design that was typical for both metal and ceramic vases. Such vases are found in various parts of Anatolia, the Aegean and the surrounding regions in the second half of the 3rd mill. BC. This fact unequivocally indicates that the presence of imported items in Thrace in the late Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age is not accidental, but resulted from contacts of different nature (commercial, political, etc.). The sites where these artifacts were found suggest the possible routes of their penetration in present-day Bulgarian lands. These are the west coast of the Black Sea and the navigable rivers, in the valleys of which the most important Bronze Age settlements were located.

Following the dating of the materials from the above-listed sites, the relative date of the jug from Burgas is in the transition between the end of the second phase and the beginning of the third phase of the Early Bronze Age. The absolute date falls in the middle or the third quarter of the 3rd mill. BC.

One possible hypothesis about the archaeological context of the find is that it came from a shipwrecked boat, a grave or a settlement that is at present below sea level, due to transgression. This idea is supported by the fact that the jug is intact and with well preserved surface.

In the article, the jug is considered an import. In the last decades, the number of the Early Bronze Age imported artifacts from Bulgaria grew considerably. Among the examples are the Trojan cups from Baa Dere, Konstantsiya and Galabovo; the specific bottle from Ezero, the so-called "pilgrim flask"; the "Syrian flask" from Galabovo and jugs and amphoroid vessels from the same site; a wheel-made vase from Sozopol; a vase from Debel; a vessel from Ovchartsi near Radnevo; anthropomorphic items from Yunatsite, Dragantsi, Kapitan Andreevo, etc. These artifacts testify to the active contacts between Anatolian communities and settlements in Southeast Thrace during different phases of the Early Bronze Age. Based on the analysis of these imported goods in Thrace, one could reconstruct a system of (bilateral?) relations in the period between the third quarter of the 3rd mill. BC and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age – 1900-1800 BC.