



## Kozareva Mogila. The Eneolithic Necropolis (excavations 2005–2018)

Book review: Petya Georgieva, Veselin Danov. *Kozareva Mogila. The Eneolithic Necropolis (excavations 2005–2018)*. With contributions by Victoria Russeva and Maria Gurova. *Archaeologia Bulgarica Supplements*, vol. 2, 2021, ISBN 978-954-92566-7-3

John Chapman <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Archaeology, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK; [j.c.chapman@dur.ac.uk](mailto:j.c.chapman@dur.ac.uk)

For several decades, an important difference between the Black Sea coast, the Lower Danube basin and Bulgarian Thrace in the Copper Age has been the abundance of cemeteries in the first two regions, with an absence in the latter. Now the first cemetery south of the Balkan Mountain range has been found, even if this is not exactly in Thrace. The report of the earlier rescue and later student training excavations presents the mortuary practices, including the grave goods, and the physical anthropology of the cemetery which contains, at present, only 37 graves – by no means a complete sample of the once existing burial ground. Although the authors make clear that further specialist reports (especially on the pottery and small finds) will be published later, the current report goes into appropriate detail on mortuary practices and grave goods, including the small assemblage of 12 lithic finds. The most impressive aspect of the report, however, concerns the physical anthropology, in which four major aspects are considered in detail: the age/sex of the skeletons, their stature and palaeopathology and the demography of this population. The whole volume is beautifully illustrated, has an excellent bibliography and extensive translated summaries in Bulgarian (fig. 1).

The cemetery lies within 300 m of the tell, which had been excavated for almost 20 years before the cemetery was discovered by chance, through deep ploughing. The blandly told story of the disgraceful delay in gaining an official excavation permit, which led to the destruction of many graves even when the significance of the site was not in question, conceals obfuscation, archaeopolitics and probably personal rivalries. What remained was a total of 51 graves – five dating to the Early Copper Age, 31 to the Late Copper Age, and the remaining 15 to the Transition Period between Copper and Bronze Ages, the Early Bronze Age and the Hellenistic period. There are two lengthy and detailed catalogues for each grave, referring to the archaeology and the physical anthropology. It would have helped the reader to have a unified catalogue with two parts for each grave.

All of the mortuary practices have been presented in meticulous detail, with the comparison



Fig. 1. Cover of the book  
Обр.1. Корица на книгата

between the Early and Late Copper Age practices clearly directed at answering the question of cultural and population continuity between Early and Late phases and, if the latter, the origins of new persons buried next to the tell. There are intriguing hints at steppe populations, with burials including extended inhumations with flexed legs, textile mats and sprinkling of red ochre but Georgieva devotes even more attention to whether the Late Copper Age burials were more closely related to the Varna group than to the Kodzhadermen–Gumelnița–Karanovo VI group. The argumentation here concerns body orientation, body position and sidedness and the presence/absence of ochre temper in the pottery, leading to the conclusion of a more probable KGKVI ancestry. But archaeological science has alternative ways of approaching this issue.

There is a modest suite of grave goods in the Late Copper Age burials, more akin to Vinitsa or Golyamo Delchevo than to Varna. A total of 31 vessels were deposited in 15 graves and a total of six flint blades (including two macro-blades), five copper objects, seven *Spondylus* beads and a single serpentinite axe-sceptre gives little sense of highly differentiated mortuary status. This conclusion chimes with the absence of clear correlations between grave good type or quantity and the age-sex categories so clearly demarcated by Russeva. All of the ‘rich’ graves (viz., those with copper or shell objects) contained red ochre but this material was also found with some of the ‘poor’ graves. Equally, the flint macro-blades were found in only the ‘richest’ graves, whether adult male or female. There is little comment on the political significance of the long-distance exotics, such as the copper and the Ludogorie flint, shown by Gurova to come from both the Ravno and the Kriva Reka sources.

One of the most intriguing findings concerns a large number of pits showing special deposition which have been excavated near the graves but no human remains. While two of the pits show the remains of funeral feasting through intensive deposition of cattle, pig and dog bones, the fill of most other pits contained small sherds, with fragments of fired clay sieves, spoons and figurines and occasionally daub fragments. Although the excavator identifies these deposits as settlement deposits and

therefore not deliberate, there is little accidental about such practices, which are paralleled at other Late Copper Age sites, such as in the ‘platforms’ at Vinitza. The re-deposition of domestic deposits is also well known from Bulgarian Thrace on Karanovo IV pit-sites. Another form of pit is identified as ‘storage pits’, although massive pithoi may also have been used in preparation for feasting.

Another form of deliberate practice involves human body fragmentation, found in both settlement and mortuary contexts at Kozareva. Human body parts have been found on the tell, as skull roundels, skull fragments, isolated mandibles, other human body parts and even as tools made of human bones. Conversely, Russeva has identified two graves where human bones from different bodies have been added to otherwise complete inhumations – a form of deviant ‘additional’ burial found at other sites in the Balkan Copper Age (Chapman 2010). The interesting social implications of these practices have yet to be integrated into the cemetery research.

Russeva’s report on the physical anthropology is one of the most detailed and informative to be published for East Balkan Copper Age cemeteries. Russeva found a higher than usual proportion of mature and senile adults, both female and male, than in most other cemeteries (cf. the high proportion of young males at Varna), with a life expectancy of up to 57 years for women who had survived to middle age. Russeva proposes that this gave an added significance for women both in social status and the transmission of cultural tradition. But what is most interesting is the high proportion, and great variety, of pathological conditions in the cemetery population, including periodontal disease, tooth crowding, enamel hypoplasia, degenerative bone disease with the possibility of tuberculosis, severe porotic hyperostosis and two cases of tumours from osteoma. There were also two cases of traumatic lesions, including a child probably killed with a blow to the head. Finally, the individual buried in grave 25 suffered from reduced mobility and possibly blindness. These pathological identifications have been detailed in the anthropological catalogue, despite the common fragmentation of the human bone and sub-optimal conditions of preservation. There is much to discuss in terms of the effects of these conditions and the kinds of mortuary treatment afforded to the high percentage of buried individuals who suffered from mild or serious illness.

The Kozareva mogila population forms a small group of 37 individuals whose cultural ancestry, health and social status forms an intriguing case-study in Copper Age bio-archaeology. There are clearly great possibilities for the modern Holy Trinity of archaeological scientific studies – aDNA, AMS dating and stable isotopic research, which this reviewer hopes will soon follow.

This fascinating volume on the Copper Age and later cemetery of Kozareva mogila introduces clear and distinctive voices on the burials, the grave goods and the physical anthropology without fully articulating these voices into a true conversation. The high quality of the separate parts is already a testament to the Kozareva mogila team that is rarely found in other East Balkan cemetery publications. I look forward to this conversation in future publications.

## Reference

Chapman, J. 2010. ‘Deviant’ burials in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of Central and South Eastern Europe. In Rebay-Salisbury, K., Sørensen, M.L.S., Hughes, J. (eds.) *Body parts and bodies whole*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 30–45.