

"SPECIAL" STONES IN PREHISTORIC PRACTICES: CASES FROM BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT. The flint and other stone artefacts are among the most numerous finds excavated during the investigation of prehistoric sites – settlements, necropolis, sanctuaries and others. Their typology, technology of manufacture and functional application has been a topic of special studies which reveal significant parts of the production, economy and organization of the prehistoric society. Part of this material is presented in complexes, related to the faith and customs of the ancient agrarians and shepherds. To the flint and other stone tools one must add stones as raw material, which are also part of the sacred set of objects used in specific rituals and deposited in burials, as well as in the bases of houses, furnaces and sanctuaries – from the Neolithic to the Late Antiquity. The special application of simple flint and other stones, as well as raw stone material has been traced in several aspects: as amulets, votives, insignia and ornaments; as attribute (inventory) in the funeral rite; as object of sacrifice.

*"Every small stone can be the primary rock,
if one can believe it"*
Alexander Fol – *Orphica Magica I*, 77

The flint and other stone artefacts are among the most numerous finds excavated during the investigation of prehistoric sites – settlements, necropolis, sanctuaries and others. Their typology, technology of manufacture and functional application has been a topic of special studies which reveal significant parts of the production, economy and organization of the prehistoric society.

To the flint and other stone tools one must add stones as raw material (most often boulders), which are also part of the sacred set of objects used in specific rituals and deposited in burials, as well as in the bases of houses, furnaces and sanctuaries – from the Neolithic to the Late Antiquity.

The special application of simple flint and other stones, as well as raw stone material has been traced in several aspects: as amulets, votives, insignia and jewellery; as attribute (inventory) in the funeral rite; as object of sacrifice.

The first group consists of miniature adzes and zoomorphic amulets, made of nephrite and other minerals or rocks, and found mainly in settlements from the Neolithic, as well as of maces and adzes-scepters. The stone adze-scepter is preserved as a ruler (king) insignia through millennia, despite the appearance of copper and bronze tools. There are numerous examples, but just some of the most important can be mentioned. In two of the richest burials of the Varna Chalcolithic necropolis stone adzes were found as part of scepters whose wooden handles have been covered by gold sheets. The adze from grave N43 (male burial) was made of a white limy sandstone and has no functional value, and the stone adze (volcanic tuff) from the symbolic grave N4 (with inventory typical for male burials) is precisely modeled, with

shining polished surface and without traces of utilization (Ivanov, Avramova, 1997, 31, 41; Kostov, Pelevina, 2006, 27).

In the settlements and necropolis from the Bronze Age stone adze-hammers without traces of utilization and zoomorphic scepters were found, owned by the notables the social structure – such are the Early Bronze Age zoomorphic scepters found at Drama (Yambol District) and in a grave near the village of Kyulevcha (Shumen District), as well as the stone adze-scepters from the Late Bronze Age from Pliska and the village of Lyulin.

Unique is the hoard, found either in the context of a settlement or necropolis in the area Zhelyuskova Koriya (village Elhovo, Stara Zagora District). The artefacts were found in a small lump of earth with pieces of red ochre. Among the artefacts is a mace from white well polished marble, a miniature carnelian axe and an amber bead. A groove has been made on the mace probably as a place for the axe which has been fixed by some kind of plant resin. The craftsmanship of the objects from rare and hard for cutting materials as well as the lack of traces for their utilization gives the right to suggest their function as insignia, which have been buried in the ground and covered by red ochre as signs for the sacred character of the action of their "hiding" (Avramova, 2002, 17-22).

The numerous ornaments – beads, bracelets, pendants and amulets made from marble, carnelian, quartz, serpentine, jasper and other minerals or rocks, which have been found in rich burials mark the high social status of the deceased (men, women and children) but they also carry certain views of life because of the place of their finding (water basins, caves, stone quarries) and their colour symbolism, related to the main deities of this period – the great Mother Goddess and her son – the Sun.

The un-worked stones, placed in burial features as part of the inventory are more or less an exception in the burial ritual and definitely mark a special attitude to the deceased, in the graves of which they are found. During the Neolithic only 3 such cases are known: in a female grave from Tsiganova Mogila (village Dositeevo) 2 sharp stones were placed along both sides of the body; a red stone was placed in the right hand of a 5-6 years old child in the complex settlement of Kurdjali; while in the multilayer settlement of Kovachevo, 10-12 months old child is placed on a big stone (Bachvarov, 2003, 110-111).

As non-regular objects can be interpreted also the two millstones in Early Neolithic graves – one from Tsiganova Mogila and one in a grave from Kurdjali, which also display a special attitude towards the deceased (Bachvarov, 2003, 136). The published cases of Chalcolithic grave features with un-worked stones are also a few: in the necropolis near the Tell Golyamo Delchevo, the bottom of the pit of grave N3 (male, 18-20 years old) was covered with “many small, rounded quartz pebbles” (Todorova, 1975, 59); in the necropolis near the Tell Vinitza (Shumen District) un-worked stones as part of the inventory were found at a place for sacrifice, in two symbolic graves and in a child burial (Raduncheva, 1976, 77-81). At the prehistoric necropolis near the Tell Golyam Ostrov (near village Durankulak, Dobrich District) 1200 graves are investigated, but only in 11 of them un-worked stones are found, placed under or around the body of the deceased. Two of the graves are symbolic, 3 are female graves, and 6 – male graves. The grave goods display a relatively high status of the deceased and the stones point out to a more specific attitude of the living towards the buried individuals (Avramova, 2008, 220-221).

Flint artefacts, placed on the body or near the head are found only in 4 Early Neolithic burial places: Kurdjali, Ezero, Rakitovo and Slatina (Bachvarov, 2003, 109). The number of flint artefacts, placed as part of the burial inventory (in cases as single grave goods) significantly increases during the Late Neolithic and during the entire Chalcolithic period. For example, only from the necropolis near the Tell Golyam Ostrov (near village Durankulak) there are 187 artefacts, found in 135 graves from the Late Neolithic (Hamanjia I-II and III culture) and the Chalcolithic (Hamanjia IV and Varna culture). The technological and typological analyses of the artefacts can point to the sources and production centres of raw material. A conclusion has been drawn in this respect that arrowheads are found only in male graves (Gurova, 2002, 247-260; Sirakov, 2002, 213-246). Flint artefacts from burials can not be related to a possible function as tools or gifts beyond this world, and they ought to be semantically interpreted as divine symbols of the supreme deity of the prehistory period – the Sun. The thunder is the weapon of the God of Heaven in all religions and the place, which he strikes with the lightning, becomes sacred, and the stricken people become initiated. It was believed that the so called “thunder stones”, most of which are nothing else but prehistorical flints, are the arrow points of the lightning and they have been honoured and preserved with reverence (Eliade, 1995, 77). This idea is vividly illustrated in the Roman faith and ritual: “The oak tree has been dedicated to Zeus-Jupiter, because the lightning strikes most often this tree. The oak at the Capitoline Hill belonged to Jupiter Feretree, who strikes, who slingers, called as well Jupiter Lapis, represented

by a flint. While making a contact, the priests killed the sacrificial pig with a flint” (Eliade, 1995, 101-102).

Hoard of flint and other stone artefacts as sacrificial gifts can be differentiated in two groups: 1 – found out of the context of settlements and necropolis; 2 – found in settlements and dwelling places. To the first group a hoard of stone tools from the Lovech District can be ascribed, which are not precisely dated, but near the finding place the following prehistoric sites are known (Petrov, 1950, 213):

- the village of Leshnitsa – 200 m NE of the village at a single place around hundred flint artefacts have been found identified as arrowheads or spearheads, knives and scrapers – all of them made of pale yellow flint (Historical Museum, Lovech, N1188-1204). At 3 km from this place flint cores were found, thus the find can be interpreted as sacrifice made near the flint quarry.
- the village of Smochan – in the area “Kasa Popanets” spearheads, arrows and knives made of white flint were found (Historical Museum, Lovech, N72, 132, 136, 137);
- Lovech – at about 5 km to the West of the town, near the fountain Gyurevets arrow points and knives, made of dark grey and pale yellowish flint have been found (Historical Museum, Lovech, N141, 142, 175);
- the village of Bulgarene – in the area Orlova Glava, at about 7 km SW of the village, a hoard of knives placed in a vessel was found, unfortunately not brought to a museum and only a single flint blade 10 cm long with a pale yellowish colour has been preserved;
- the village of Svoboda, near Chirpan – a hoard of stone adzes is discovered by chance in 1935 in the area Darakchiite at 0.30 cm depth. The adzes are 29 in number, piled together, well polished, with a length from 2.5 to 25 cm and only few of them have marks of utilization (28 are in the Archaeological Museum in Plovdiv, and 1 sample – in the National Archaeological Institute and Museum in Sofia; they are supposed to be Late Neolithic, from the end of the VI mill. BC; Tsonchev, 1946, 209).

The hoards of flint tools found in settlements and dwelling places are numerous. Of importance is their exact place in the corresponding structure, which gives opportunity for interpretations.

Tell Russe. During the first stage of the excavations in 1949-1953 several hoards of flint artefacts have been registered, found at different depths. One of them, composed of “15 well preserved curved flint knives” was found at 2.20 m (made of pale yellow flint and traces of use). A second hoard is from 3.70 m depth and is composed of 24 pale yellow flint knives which have not been used. The third hoard is from house N2 at a depth of 4.70 m, composed of 30 flint knives and scrapers, made of flint of different colour, and on most of the artefacts there are no traces of use (it is suggested that they have been buried later at such depth). Other 16 flint knives and scrapers were found nearby which probably belong to the same hoard (Georgiev, Angelov, 1952, 124-127). These hoards can probably be determined as building sacrifice during the initial building stage of the new settlement. In the period 1986-1990 a two store temple from the IV horizon (beginning of the Late Chalcolithic) has been investigated, in which a modeled image of the Great Goddess – Mother and three vessels have been

found. In one of the vessels a hoard of flints was found (Popov, 1993, 21).

Tell Hotnitsa. In house N5 of the III horizon a hoard of 24 non-retouched flint slices from one core were found, probably placed in a pouch as a building sacrifice (Chohadjiev, Elenski, 2002, 15-16).

Tell Smyadovo. On the floor of a destroyed house there was a hoard of 59 artefacts ranging in size 14-17 cm – adzes, scrapers, knives and bladelets without traces of utilization (*Macht, Herrschaft und Gold*, 1988, 211).

Tell Golyamiya Ostrov (the village of Durankulak). In 1998 in the SE part of the settlement from the VII horizon a building was investigated, in the base of which numerous flint debitage pieces with miniature sizes (personal observation) were found.

Tell Cjkmaka (near Isperikh). The settlement is situated near one of the large flint deposits in the region. At a distance of 500-1000 m from the mound pits with large dimensions (diameter 5-8 m, depth 1.5-1.8 m) were investigated, that were filled with cores, flakes and debitage from the flint production – the pits have been interpreted as parts of a workshop (Skakun, 2006, 62). It is more likely that they have a ritual character and these deposits are a sacrifice to the Great Goddess – Mother, in order to give “birth” again to flint of a good quality. A similar idea is suggested for the ore pits at Mechi Kladenets (Stara Zagora), where after the exhaustion of the ore the shafts have been intentionally filled up.

Flint artefacts are known also from hoards and structures of closed complexes with different objects. Several cases can be listed:

- the village of *Samovodene (Veliko Turnovo Region)*. In the sacred space of the Early Neolithic settlement a cult shaft is found, where periodic sacrifices have taken place – the layers comprised burned sherds, animal bones, plant wood residues as well as numerous river pebbles (Elenski, 2003, 194);
- *Tell Golyamiya Ostrov (the village of Durankulak)*. In the necropolis situated on the West bank of the lake, 62 of the Chalcolithic grave sets have artefacts placed in a vessel (the set including flint blades, smoother, a lump of red ochre, bone awl, mussel shell and a bone or copper hair needle). The vessels are miniature models of the large vessel-depots, known from the settlement. The largest number of sets is found in female graves – 32, followed by the male graves, the symbolic graves, and rarely – in child graves. In all the cases, the graves have a very rich inventory. The set of objects placed in the vessel obviously is related to certain magic rituals for the fulfillment of victory over the illness or death and/or new birth after the transition to the outer world. The obligatory presence of flint (male – solar) and smoother (female – chthonic) mark the most important presence that ensure new life (Avramova, 2008, 223-224);
- the village of *Peklyuk (Sofia District)*. In the area Gornite Ushi, on a low terrace near the rock massif Krivsha a structure composed of 6 stones arranged in a circle of 1 m in diameter is investigated. In the NW part of the circle other three stones form an inner circle that is 0.50 m diameter. In the outer circle a vessel with cover was found, while in the inner circle there was a broken plate, animal bones, charcoal and charred wheat. Burned daub, burned wheat, 6 flint knives, 2 bone

ornaments, quartz model of a human leg and a small pale pinkish stone were found in the vessel. The structure is located at a significant distance from the discovered settlement. The finds are dated to the Late Chalcolithic (second half of the V mill. BC) and are interpreted as a symbolic burial (Petkov, 1961, 67-68). It can be suggested that this structure is a sacrificial place in a pit made near a rock massif with two caves and a probable rock sanctuary;

- *Tell Omurtag.* In an undisturbed by fire horizon of the settlement (first half of the Late Chalcolithic, 4500-4300 cal BC) a hoard in a vessel was found including 11 fragments of *Spondylus* bracelets, 8 small *Spondylus* fragments, a *Cardium* shell, broken perforated bone pendant, one polished stone bead, two bone plates, three pig incisors, two flint proximal blade segments, a piece of pumice (imported), one trapezoidal miniature polished stone axe and two quartzite polishing pebbles (smoothers) (Gaydarska et al., 2006, 9-62);

- *Lyubimetz.* In the pit sanctuary Dana Bunar 2 pits from the Late Neolithic (culture Karanovo III-IV and Karanovo IV) are studied where numerous flint artefacts, millstones, hammerstones, quartz balls and grindstones were found together with fragmented pottery, charcoal, ash and animal bones (Nikolov et al., 2007; 2008, 57-60; Nikolov, 2008, 32, 33);

- the village of *Tatul, Momchilgrad Region*. Sherds, flint debitage, animal bones and stones of different sizes are arranged in the base and the fill of ritual furnaces at a sanctuary from the Bronze Age (Ovcharov et al., 2008, 544-546).

The tradition of placing stone objects or flint flakes in burial structures was preserved even in the Antiquity period. Two cases can be mentioned:

- *mound N13, Sboryanovo* – in the lower part of the mound at a single place 46 flint artefacts were found. From them only 13 have been used as tools and the rest are semi-handworked articles and debitage. The use wear analysis and the typological analysis of the flints identifies them as prehistoric objects, but they have been re-deposited during the construction of the tomb and its mound. Flint objects of similar characteristics have been found also in burial from the catacomb culture on the Don River (Gergova, 1996, 23; Skakun, 1996, 216-222);

- *mound N12, Sboryanovo* – at a level of stones in the tomb a fragment of a stone vessel and a stone mortar with traces of red pigment were found (Gergova, 1996, 31, 41).

The role and the symbolism of the rocks and the “special” stones in the Antiquity period of the Balkans and Asia Minor is discussed in the monograph *Rock Topoi of Faith in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Asia Minor during the Antiquity* (Fol, 2007). An outstanding example for the application of stone in the misterial ritual can be cited here: “A strong indirect prove for the Mycenaean rock antiquity of Eleusina is the priest, who “wears a stone”” (Fol, 2007, 56).

In the traditional Bulgarian rituals and customs, the faith in the magic power of stones is still preserved: “According to the folklore tradition in the fight between the ‘hala’ (mythological female monster or dragon) and other village dragons the dragon throws fire arrows and stones, which result in lightning and thunder. A popular idea is that St. Iliya makes the arrows and gives them to the dragons to fight the ‘hala’. These arrows penetrate 40 ‘arshins’ (1 ‘arshin’=28 inches= 68.75 cm) deep in

the earth and they appear on its surface only after 40 days. The arrows are called 'bozha strela' (God's arrow), 'treshten kamak' (thunder stone), 'grom padina' (something that fell after thunder), 'strela' (arrow), 'grumnato kamuche' (small thunder stone) and it is believed that they can cure, bring luck and protect from 'treshtavane', and also that, evil can not enter a house with such a stone. The stones are tied to children to ensure health and to cure epilepsy" (Georgieva, 1983, 84).

The 'treskavitsa' (thunder) according to the folklore tradition is an arrow of fire with a sharp flint edge. When it thunders and there are lightings, "St. Iliya throws these arrows with his bow targeting those men, who have many sins and do not want to take any penitence." The fallen arrows intrude deep into the earth. If someone finds such arrow, this is good luck, because such an arrow is very curative and protects the house (Marinov, 1981, 63-65).

The sorcerers and witch doctors also often use river pebbles, which they transform in magic objects and with which they cure different illnesses – for example a dead bone, wart and different swellings (Todorova-Pirgova, 2003, 268, 337, 345, 382).

One interesting ritual has been preserved for a long time in the Rhodopes. In the night before the New Year (when the Sun is "born" and is the weakest) boys go to the river to collect smooth stones. In the morning they carry these stones to each house and place them on the chest of the owner or 'buhali' on the floor with good wishes. "The number and the size of the stones brought in one house served as indication for the respect of the house and generosity of its owners. The gathered river pebbles at 'Surva' (New Year) have been called 'papune' and they have been placed in the base of new buildings or used for strengthening of old stone fences and gardens, so that the brought solemn words should stay at the house" (Raichevski, 1998, 12).

A similar ritual, but organized at Eniovdan (at the Summer solstice) has been observed in Sozopol. The owners of each house bring from the Sea one round or oval stone, throwing before that an old Sea stone, so that everything bad can go with it. The woman of the house shows the exact place of the stone in the house (usually behind the front door), so that the stone should protect the house and should accumulate every evil. Similar ritual has been kept in most of the towns along the Southern Black Sea coast (Porozhanov, 2004, 133).

Instead of conclusion a few citations from the "Mythological Library" of Apollodor can be presented. "After the deluge, by which Zeus has killed the people from the Copper Age, Deucalion and Pyrrha wanted to continue the human race. At the advice of Zeus they started to throw stones behind their backs, and those thrown by Deucalion became males, and those by Pyrrha – females. This is the etymology for people "laós" from the word "láas" – stone (Book 1, 7, 2). "Hermes wanted from Apollo for the syrinx, created by him, to be taught to the sorcery art. Thus Apollo took the syrinx and in his return teaches Hermes to foretell by small stones" (Book 3, 10, 2 and note N396 – these stones have been called "thria" and have been related to three sisters, which bred Apollo on Parnas; stones were placed on a tripod in the Delphi's temple,

which moved when the sorcerer was foretelling the future in ecstasy).

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