

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE GOLD SPIRALS FROM THE RITUAL STRUCTURES NEAR DUBENE, KARLOVO REGION

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**ABSTRACT.** The article is a preliminary report on the gold spirals from ritual structures near the village of Dubene, Karlovo Region. Presented are preliminary notes on the typology, distribution, weight and chronology of the gold spirals.

In the last several years the ritual structures and necropolis near the village of Dubene, Karlovo Region, became one of the significant excavation sites in the Bulgarian archaeology. Over 21000 miscellaneous in their kind and typology gold artefact or elements of various adornments were found together with other assortment of materials (Christov, 2005; 2007; 2008; Hristov, 2006).

Attention will be paid here to the spirals only, at that to those made of non-massive gold wire, since they are a majority; those made of massive gold wire are only two. The common trait between them is the backward folding of the gold wire. They all show one full coil then the wire is folded in the opposite direction one or several times. Namely the presence and the absence of these folds form the criterion that defines the typology of the spirals and their classification into subtypes.

### Typology of the gold spirals

Type I. Spirals with one and a half coils, without backward folds. Depending on the massiveness of the wire they could be divided into two subtypes.

Subtype 1. A spiral made of non-massive gold wire. Just one spiral of this type had been found so far.

Subtype 2. Spirals of coil and a half made of massive gold wire with circular cross-section. Two spirals of this type had been found so far.

Type II. Spirals with one coil and various numbers of backward folds.

Subtype 1. Spirals with one coil and one backward folds – 8 pcs (Fig. 1).

Subtype 2. Spirals with one coil and two backward folds – 8 pcs.

Subtype 3. Spirals with one coil and three backwards folds – 19 pcs (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Type II – subtype 1 gold spiral



Fig. 2. Type II – subtype 3 gold spiral

Subtype 4. Spirals with one coil and four backward folds – 6 pcs.

Subtype 5. Spirals with one coil and five backward folds – 2 pcs.

Subtype 6. A spiral with one coil and six backward folds – 2 pcs.

Subtype 7. A spiral with one coil and nine backward folds – 1 pc (Fig. 3).

The total number of the spirals found in the studied so far structures is 48.



Fig. 3. Type II – subtype 7 gold spiral

#### Distribution of the spirals among the structures

- Ritual structure (RS) N2 – 1 pc.
- Ritual structure N3 – 16 pcs.
- Ritual structure N4 – 7 pcs.
- Ritual structure N5 – 16 pcs.
- Ritual structure N8 – 1 pc.
- Ritual structure N9 – 6 pcs.
- Large Mound (LM) N3 – 1 pc.

With the exception of the two spirals of massive gold wire – one from RS N2 and the other from LM N3 – it is evident that there is steadiness in their distribution among the structures. Miniature beads had been found in the structures where the spirals are more – RS N3 and RS N8. It should be said here that the artefact discussed are of relatively small dimensions and low weights. In the other case, no bead accompanied the bigger both in diameter and thickness of the wire and therefore heavier spirals – RS N4 and RS N9. As a whole the spirals with 2 to 4 backward folds predominate – 73.3% in the structures. Most abundant, however, are those with three backward folds – 42.2% of the total number.

#### Notes on the weights of the spirals

The thickness of the gold wire is significant for the weight of that type of objects, as well as its length and number of backward folds. The similar total weight of the spirals found in ritual structures N3, 4, 5 and 9 (One of the spirals was found on the surface of structure 9. This suggests that other spirals were possibly taken out of their context during agricultural treatment of the terrain (Table 1) (independently of the predetermined in their production parameters). In its turn, this gives enough reason to suggest that despite the inner typology of the artefact, of the metric data and their number in each of these four structures, the ancient craftsman or craftsmen had predetermined the almost equal quantity of gold for their production, i.e. their production had been planned to a certain extent.

Table 1

Total weight and diameter of the wire of the spirals from the various structures

RS N	Diameter of the wire (tube), mm	Total weight, g
RS2	0.28	6.3
RS3	0.12-0.13	26.2
RS4	0.15	23.21
RS5	0.12	25.61
RS8	0.2	gold tube
RS9	1.5	19.97
LM3	0.23	3.27

On the other hand, they were probably made by different individuals considering the differences in the thickness of the wires and in the number of the backward folds.

#### Observations concerning the age of the spirals

The pottery presents a good basis for the dating of the gold spirals and the rest of the artefact made of precious metal in the structures. The shape and the ornamentation of the ceramic vessels make it possible to date the studied structures with relative precision in the third stage of the Early Bronze Age in Thrace, at that some of them might be from its very beginning. The vessels with a T-shaped rim, the Yunatsite type of cups, the handles with a protrusion in their upper end, the spouted vessel and the shapes of the jugs find parallels in a series of archaeological sites in Thrace: Yunatsite (Katincharov, Matsanova, 1993, s. 17), Karanovo (Hiller, Nikolov, 2002, 12), etc., all dated in the EBA III (Leshtakov, 2006, 177-182). The shape of one of the vessels finds its analogues among the materials of the same period from the lands in the North of the Danube River – the site in Odaya Turkuluy in Romania (Băjenaru, 2003, abb. 2).

Thus, in the context of the ceramic vessels, the gold spirals should be dated in the Early Bronze Age III, according to the periodization accepted in Bulgaria. Similarly folded spirals had been found in the area along the upper and the middle courses of the Danube in complexes that refer to the Middle Bronze Age, for example – the Franzhausen necropolis (Neugebauer-Maresch, Neugebauer, 1989, Taf. 7-3; 8-3), the grave from Lübingen in Thuringia (Dawid, 2002, Taf. 281, 5-6) and some graves in the necropolis of Lekı Male (Kowiańska-Piaszukowa, Kurnatowski, 1953, rys. 27, 7-9), as well as among materials from Romania that date from the Middle or the Late Bronze Ages, from complexes of the cultures of Verbichoara and Monteoru (Berciu, 1961, 145, abb. 15; Gogăltan, 1999, Fig. 41-2; Zaharia, 1959, abb. 2-5) and other in the Central Europe. Similar artefact found their parallels in complexes that also belong to the Middle Bronze Age: the second building horizon of Tell of Gulubovo (Leshtakov, 1996, Fig. 11-4) and the tumulus burial near the village of Ovchartsi, Radnevo Region (Alexandrov, 2007, s. 2-12).

Having in mind these later parallels and the preliminary stage of investigation, it is possible to suggest that the earliest so far spirals of one full coil, followed by backward folds came from the area of Western Thrace, at that namely from the ritual structures near Dubene, which are dated in the EBA III. It seems to me that the hypothesis for their local origin is not void of reason, too.

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