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THE TYPOLOGICAL SIMILARITIES OF EARLY IRON AGE
"PRINCELY BURIALS" OF THE BALKANS AND
CENTRAL EUROPE

The appearance of princely tombs in the central Balkans marks a field of archaeological investigation where analytical, synthetic and comparative archaeology come into direct contact with the methodology and objectives of social and cultural anthropology. Comparative-synthetic archaeological data on princely tombs in the central Balkans during the Early Iron Age reveal this to be a broader cultural phenomenon, whose cultural and social importance is neither local nor partial, but to a large extent decisive for the whole prehistoric cultural model of the time. Investigations of princely tombs inevitably point to the conclusion that in protohistoric times the central Balkans were an integral part of the general European continental cultural model and that this model was almost uniquely shaped and developed through contact with more advanced Mediterranean cultures, although it had some specific features and a separate typological determination of its own. Some of these characteristics were confirmed by findings in the princely tombs of the central Balkans and the rich Scythian tombs of the Eurasian steppes, as well as in the Celtic tombs of central and western Europe, as in the case of the princely tombs of Magdalenenberg, Hochdorf and Vix. Although these tombs do not provide comprehensive information about the everyday life and material culture of the central Balkan tribes as a whole, but only about burial rites for their leaders and distinguished warriors, who comprised a kind of aristocracy, this archaeological phenomenon greatly facilitates a reconstruction of the general cultural-anthropological model of prehistoric Balkan communities during the Early Iron Age, i.e. just before they stepped onto the stage of European history.

The starting premises and scientific hypotheses, verified by analytic-synthetic and synthetic-comparative methods, have been confirmed by evidence that the princely tombs of the central Balkans during the Early Iron Age reflected the general cultural process which had been evolving during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. on the soil of Europe and Asia Minor, shaping a completely new model of protohistoric culture.

The fact that princely tombs appear over a relatively short period of time indicates a phenomenon which evolved rather abruptly during the last decades of the sixth century B.C. and disappeared just as abruptly in the first half of the fifth century B.C., not only in the central Balkans but in central Europe as well, although similar princely tombs were to appear in both Bulgaria and Macedonia during the Hellenistic Age and later on.

The discovery of several monumental and rich tombs dating from the Early Iron Age in the central Balkans showed that social stratification in ethnical groups and tribes living in the area during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. was becoming increasingly evident. Similar phenomena obviously occurred in a broader cultural area, stretching from the Black Sea to the Atlantic coast, as illustrated by the sumptuous tombs of tribal leaders and warriors in Bulgaria, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Bavaria, Germany and France.

Numerous findings from the monumental princely tombs of the Balkan area and the territory of present-day Yugoslavia, particularly Atenica and Novi Pazar — and their comparisons with similar findings in Pilatović, Arareva Gromila, Pećka Banja, Umčari, Mramorac and Trebenište — indicate quite a uniform process of change in the general cultural model of the Early Iron Age. The growing status of the warrior class and the rising affluence of the tribal aristocracy led to the establishment of new cultural relations and forms among which the so-called princely tombs are of exceptional importance. They reflect changes in material culture and in the social structure of corresponding prehistoric communities, changes in the way of life and in burial rites. Burial rituals obviously depended more and more on the social status, standing, wealth and authority of the deceased. Princely tombs also attest to the fact that the traditional way of life increasingly gave way to new forms and that new habits and customs were adapted to the needs of an elevated and more powerful class of tribal leaders. With their different way of life, costly personal equipment, ornate weapons and monumental burial rites, they expressed new cultural forms and confirmed their power in new social relations.

The monumentality of the princely tombs and, especially, their contents, points to a certain typological uniformity in the cultural models of the Early Iron Age. Spread out from Thrace to the Channel these tombs establish a typological link between

different and quite remote cultural zones and communities, forming a sort of common denominator for the culture of the period. In its highest forms, this culture can be largely recognized and understood, and hence scientifically explained, thanks to princely necropolises and excavations of princely tombs in the barbarian hinterland of a different and considerably more developed Mediterranean culture. Although the links and contacts between the cultures of the Asian steppes and the European and Balkan communities of the Early Iron Age have not been comprehensively examined and studied, there is no doubt that distinct typological similarities do exist. They are reflected in burial rites and in the tombs' contents, whose typological kinship can be traced from princely tombs in Europe and Scythian kurgans in the Dnieper river-basin and on the Kuban plateau to the famous kurgans in the High and Eastern Altai.

The discovery of identical and similar archaeological material in all princely and luxurious tombs in Europe and in the Balkans, along with considerable similarities in burial rites for warriors and the tribal aristocracy, allow, even on the basis of fleeting comparisons, an appreciation of some common traits in princely necropolises of the Early Iron Age. These would include the following: 1) monumental size, mostly under large mound graves (tumuli and kurgans); 2) square tombs with wooden or stone constructions; 3) abundance of fine quality articles, made of precious metals, mostly gold; 4) numerous imported Graeco-Italic objects, mostly bronze dishes and pottery; 5) burial of the deceased with his chariots, riding equipment, sometimes with the team of horses and many personal effects, ornaments and arms which the deceased might need in his after-life. Besides many other less relevant data confirming the uniformity of princely tombs the East Altai, through the Balkans to Burgundy, the general similarities which have been established could be invaluable in pinpointing the cultural typology of princely tombs in the central Balkans during the Early Iron Age.

The parallel characteristics established between distinctive princely tombs and more modest warrior burial rites as well as alternative incidental findings in the central Balkans, offer sound grounds for the further synthetic archaeological and cultural-anthropological investigation of princely tombs as a unique cultural phenomenon of the Early Iron Age. The transformations in the Hallstatt culture and other cultural types of the period, occurred, to a large extent as a result of social stratification, i. e. the rise and growing affluence of the whole tribe in which new social relationships were established and new institutions of power created. A small circle of tribal leaders and the warrior aristocracy in social communities which were obviously on the rise acquired a growing standing and social importance, which, in turn, meant growing social power. The strengthening

of certain expanding tribal communities only further influenced the process of social differentiation, which was inevitably attended by corresponding changes in the system of culture. Expansion into other regions, tribal conflicts over new territories, new pastures, salt-water springs and more favourable terms of exchange with other tribes and cultures brought not only great prosperity to the tribe at large, but also greater esteem and power to the tribal leaders, especially all the more so if they led invasions and plundered neighbouring and even other more remote territories.

Various imported material found in the Scythian tombs around the Sea of Azov and in the princely necropoles of Duvanli, Trebenište, Atenica and Novi Pazar, and even in Hochdorf and Vix, prove the existence of not only firm but regular and diversified cultural and trade links between the so-called barbarian tribes populating the hinterland and the Greek coastal towns and colonies on the Black Sea, the Adriatic and the western Mediterranean during the Middle Iron Age. The types of weapons and warrior equipment, particularly the Greek-Illyrian and Corinthian type helmets, large bronze dishes richly decorated with similar relief applications, fine Greek pottery mostly of the black-figure type, silver dishes and some examples of finely crafted Greek jewelry, clearly support the assumption that the whole Hallstatt D horizon underwent a lively and advanced process of cultural symbiosis and was exposed to the powerful reflection of Greek culture on various tribes and tribal communities in the hinterland.

The diversity and richness of the archaeological findings in princely tombs of the Early Iron Age in the central Balkans, and in other Balkan and non-Balkan areas, allow us to conclude that the actual cultural form of these burial rites is exceptionally important for a cultural-anthropological study of prehistoric and protohistoric communities. These findings point to a certain dialectical feedback between the expansion of a burgeoning society, its growing internal social stratification, its more direct contacts with other peoples and tribes on the one hand, and certain structural changes in the cultural forms and contents of that society on the other. Persuasive evidence of the stability and strength of this connection is provided by the archeologically established premise that burgeoning tribal communities, with their strong emphasis on the warrior social order, were most probably tribal alliances whose leaders were certainly held above local community chiefs and who, therefore, were in a position to prove and reinforce their power by seizing ever-larger shares of the booty. The social stratification of warrior tribes and tribal alliances, conditioned by their expansion, thus encouraged the creation, adoption and assimilation of new cultural forms, a large part of which have been preserved in the princely necropoles of the Early Iron Age.

The monumental and rich princely tombs found in the Balkans and other parts of Europe and Asia Minor have enabled greater scientific insight into the character and content of a general and common cultural type linked to the social transformation and social stratification of different tribal communities encompassed by the course of historical development and cultural growth. Geographical distance, distinguishing anthropological traits and ethnic origin, which to a certain extent obviously influenced the determination of different local customs and rituals, do not seem to have really disturbed the general process of forming and shaping a, more or less, uniform cultural model.

This model was characteristic of many social and tribal communities which existed under similar conditions and were at approximately the same development level during the Early Iron Age. The power, prestige and hierarchical status of warrior leaders and tribal elders, from whose ranks the first aristocratic strata in the so-called heroic societies emerged, were reflected, among other things, in the acceptance and ever-broader application of certain burial forms and funeral rites. These distinguished the ruling and inner leading circle from the common people and other members of the tribe. The inconsistent and non-uniform method of burial, which, depending on the local and tribal traditions of the earlier *Urnenfelder* culture and various other factors, varied from cremation to burial (both in separate mound graves, kurgans and monumental tumuli and in flat graves), cannot, however, provide the necessary data for determining the oneness of the cultural model of the exceptionally important princely tombs from the Hallstatt D culture. Far sounder and more reliable data on the character and cultural uniformity of princely tombs as cultural indicators are to be found in the objects discovered in these graves, particularly costly and imported possessions for daily, personal and ritual use. These objects allow one to determine, with relative certainty, the level of social and cultural development of these burgeoning tribal communities and ethnic groups of the Early Iron Age.

ТИПОЛОШКЕ СЛИЧНОСТИ КНЕЖЕВСКИХ ГРОБОВА СТАРИЈЕГ ГВОЗДЕНОГ ДОБА НА БАЛКАНУ И У СРЕДЊОЈ ЕВРОПИ

Резиме

Појава кнежевских гробова на подручју централног Балкана означава ону област археолошких истраживања где се аналитичка, синтетичка и компаративна археологија непосредно сусрећу са методологијом и задацима социјалне и културне антропологије. Археолошка компаративно-синтетичка обрада података о кнежевским гробовима на централном Балкану у периоду старијег гвозденог доба показује да је у питању

једна шира културна појава, чији културни и социјални значај није локалан ни парцијалан, већ у знатној мери одређујући за читав модел праисторијске културе тога раздобља. На основу испитивања кнежевских гробова неизбежно се намеће закључак да је област средишњег Балканског полуострва у протоисторији била интегрални део општег европског континенталног културног модела и да се тај модел готово на јединствен начин уобичавао и развијао у додирима и сусретима са напреднијим медитеранским културама испољавајући при тим сусретима многе специфичности због засебног типолошког одређења. Неке од тих специфичности потврдиле су се у кнежевским гробовима на тлу централног Балкана, подједнако као и у богатим скитским гробовима предњоазијских кубанских степа, односно у келтским гробовима средње и западне Европе, као што су кнежевски гробови из Магдалененберга, Хохдорфа и Вика. Мада не дају довољно података о свакодневном животу и материјалној култури средњобалканских племена у целини, већ само о погребним ритуалима њихових племенских вођа и угледних ратника који су чинили неку врсту племенске аристократије, кнежевски гробови као археолошка и антрополошка појава у великој мери олакшавају реконструкцију општег културно-антрополошког модела праисторијских балканских заједница у периоду старијег гвозденог доба, тј. непосредно пре него што су те заједнице ступиле на позорницу европске историје.