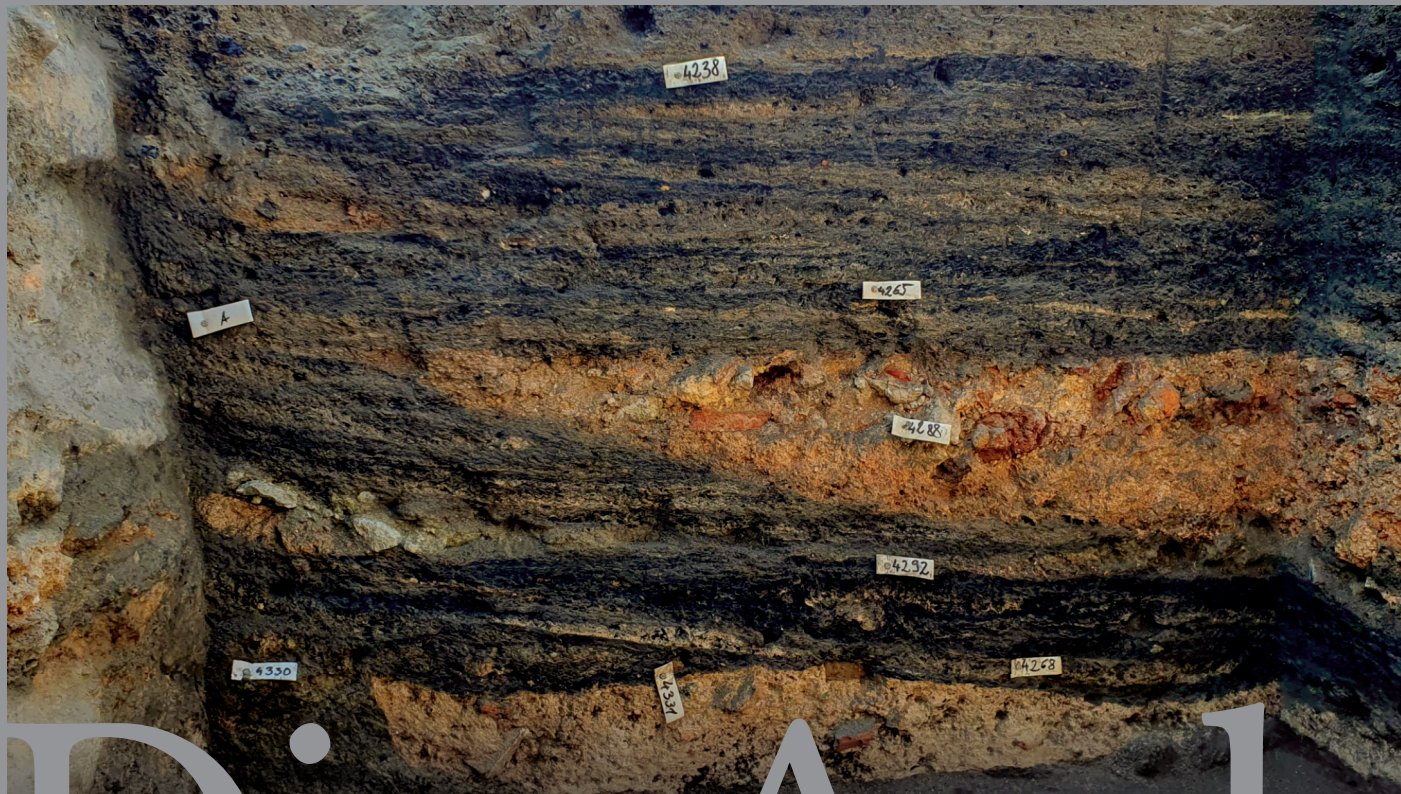


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The concept of the ancient homeland of the Fenno-Ugric-speaking peoples
in light of complex research

In Turkish Thrace

The Early Iron Age cultural environment of the Tundza and Maritsa valleys

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Abstract: In the Early Iron Age, Turkish Thrace had a cultural identity largely identical to the rest of Thrace. Nevertheless, this area, separated by the Matitsa and Tundza rivers and the Strandzha (Istranca/Yıldız) Mountains, also produced some unique cultural values.

The Early Iron Age (EIA) cultural structure of Eastern Thrace is best traced in the first part of the valleys created by the Tundza and Maritsa rivers within the borders of Turkey. The numerous settlements in the valleys and on top of the nearby hills outline the cultural dynamics of the region during the Early Iron Age. The surface materials recovered from these sites indicate close connections with Bulgarian Thrace, the Carpathians, the north-western Balkans, and Anatolia.

The study presents the results of a pottery analysis and a settlement typology, opening a new perspective for research on the EIA of Turkish Thrace. The attached database may be the core of a dataset covering the entire Eastern Thrace.

Keywords: Turkish Thrace, Maritsa Valley, Tundzha Valley, Anatolia, Northwestern Balkans

Introduction

The Maritsa River, one of the largest rivers in the Balkans, springs from the northern slopes of the Rila Mountains (Rila Hill) in southwestern Bulgaria. The river flows for about 200 km within the borders of today's Bulgaria and enters the territory of Turkey north of Karaağaç near the provincial centre of Edirne. The Evros joins the Tundzha River, which also takes its source in Bulgaria, and enters Turkish territory near the village of Suakacağı northwest of Edirne.

Due to the confluence of the Arda River with the Tundzha and Maritsa rivers being in almost the same spot, below Edirne the river continues with a very high flow rate towards the south. This increase in flow must have affected inhabitation in the region in ancient times, just like today. There is no trace of any settlement within a 1-km zone on either side of the river in the southern half of Edirne. This lack of data may be related to the alluvial fill of the river, but more likely to the fact that the flood zones, where living conditions have always been difficult to control, were not preferred for settling in the Early Iron Age (EIA).

To understand the EIA cultural development of the Thrace, it is crucial to be familiar with the geography of the region where the Maritsa and Tundza rivers meet in the northwestern corner of Turkish Thrace. Even the few finds obtained from this area are a key for the identification of the EIA cultures in eastern Thrace.

Goals and methods

This study overviews the EIA cultural development along the valleys of the Tundzha (Tunca) and Maritsa (Meriç) rivers, both springing from different countries and having fairly long sections in their territories and converging in Turkey, where they enter eastern Thrace (Figs 1–2).

Focusing on a small part of eastern Thrace, this study presents the evaluation of data from a rescue excavation conducted by the Edirne Museum Directorate in the Maritsa Valley in the 1990s, the pottery found during surveys of prehistoric sites in the 1990s, and the results of a recent preventive field survey conducted by the author of this paper and revolving around the EIA record of the area. The rescue excavation in the Maritsa Valley was carried out at Bahçelik/Eski Kadın site by the river where it enters Turkey; the results have remained unpublished until today. The EIA pottery recovered by the surveys conducted in the 1990s has not been published in detail.



Fig. 1. Topographic map of Turkish Thrace (source: <https://www.frmtr.com/>).



Fig. 2. 3D satellite image of study area (source: Google Earth™).

All these field data have been revised and, through a typological classification and collecting of analogies, an attempt is presented here to define the little-known EIA cultural development of Turkish Thrace, as well as some new suggestions on settlement typology, the analogies and distribution of the pottery record, and other outlined cultural characteristics and dynamics in the region.

A brief history of Early Iron Age research in Turkish Thrace

The earliest fieldworks on prehistoric sites in eastern Thrace are some short-term survey and sondage excavations in Edirne, carried out by Şevket Aziz Kansu in 1959. The descriptions of pottery in Kansu's reports on Çardakaltı settlement suggest that EIA finds and possibly features were also discovered but could not be correctly identified due to the limited information available at the time.

The dolmens and obelisks defined as menhirs, which Kansu drew attention to in his works about Edirne, were defined as part of a culture that does not go back to the Bronze Age.¹

The first detailed information on the Late Bronze (LBA) and EIA cultural development of eastern Thrace came from the excavation of the Taşlıcabayır stone tumulus in Kırklareli province by Mehmet Özdoğan in 1982.² In the 1980s, 118 dolmens have been identified throughout the Strandzha Mountains within the frame of the Eastern Thrace research project led by M. Özdoğan; a rescue excavation was carried out in 1994 at Arpalık, one of the discovered dolmens.³

Within the framework of the prehistoric research project in Edirne in the 1990s, Burçin Erdoğan has identified a series of EIA settlements, especially around the Tunca and Meriç rivers and their tributaries;⁴ besides, Engin Beksaç overviewed the LBA–EIA megalithic monuments in northwestern Anatolia and Turkish Thrace early 2000s,⁵ and Rabia Erdoğan analysed the EIA megalithic monuments in Turkish Thrace in her MA thesis completed in 2005.⁶

1 KANSU 1963; KANSU 1971.

2 ÖZDOĞAN 1987.

3 AKMAN 1997; AKMAN 2010, 169.

4 ERDOĞU 1997; ERDOĞU 1999.

5 BEKSAÇ 2006; BEKSAÇ 2007; BEKSAÇ 2008; BEKSAÇ 2009; BEKSAÇ 2010; BEKSAÇ 2011; BEKSAÇ 2012; BEKSAÇ 2013; BEKSAÇ 2015; BEKSAÇ 2016; BEKSAÇ 2019; BEKSAÇ – NURENGİN BEKSAÇ 2017.

6 ERDOĞU 2005.

In his study on the EIA cultures of Turkey and Southeastern Bulgaria, I. Czyborra presented a comprehensive classification and evaluation of the pottery record of the area.⁷ In his 2024 PhD dissertation, the entire EIA cultural development of eastern Thrace was reassessed in light of the new findings from previous research and surveys.⁸

Chronology of the Early Iron Age in eastern Thrace

Already the earliest studies suggested the 12th–11th centuries as the start of the Iron Age in Thrace.⁹ Apart from typochronological dating, scientific age data have also been obtained from the region in the recent years. Although archaeometric data in general point to the Iron Age having started in northeastern Bulgaria in the 11th and 10th centuries BC,¹⁰ radiocarbon analyses on materials from some important centres in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains have revealed that the LBA in southern/southeastern Thrace ended in the 12th century BC and that the following period until the 11th century BC, when EIA Phase I started, was a transitional phase.¹¹

The stratigraphic and archaeometric chronology of the sites in the Rhodope Mountains is consistent with those in northwestern Anatolia and the Aegean. The beginning of the LBA–EIA transitional phase in eastern Thrace is contemporary with the beginning of the LH IIIC in the Aegean, dated to approximately 1200–1170 BC.¹²

The EIA at Troy starts with Layer VIIb1, dominated by a Balkan-influenced material culture and starting in 1190–1180 BC.¹³ This layer is coeval with the LBA–EIA transitional phase in eastern Thrace. The Iron Age begins with Level IV at Maydos Kilisetepe Mound on the Gallipoli Peninsula at the southernmost tip of Thrace. Based on the radiocarbon results from the last phase of the previous layer, it is assumed that Layer IV started between 1300 and 1200 BC.¹⁴ The EIA cultures of Thrace have been divided into two main stages, Phase I and Phase II. The research history of the region includes different views on which centuries these phases might cover.¹⁵

Radiocarbon results from Ada Tepe and Gluhite Kamani in Bulgaria and the supporting analyses from the Stambolovo cemetery, Dolno Cherkovishte, and Kazanlık suggest that, at least in south-southeastern Bulgaria, the LBA–EIA transitional phase can be dated to the 12th century BC, EIA Phase I to the 11th–10th centuries BC, and Phase II to the 9th–7th/6th centuries BC.¹⁶

In parts of south/southeastern Thrace, the end of EIA is believed to have taken place in a longer period from 7th century BC on, when wheel-made pottery first appeared.¹⁷ As for other parts of the region, this process is suggested to have started around 600 BC.¹⁸

7 CZYBORRA 2001.

8 DOĞAN 2023.

9 BOYADZIEV 1995; ALEXANDROV 2002, 81; LESHTAKOV 2009, 62–63; DIMITROVA 2011, 73; BOZHINOVA 2012, 51, 61; HRISTOVA 2018, 99; NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, 17–18, Tab. 1; DZHANFEZOVA 2018, 315. For the earliest proposals on the subject, see ČIČIKOVA 1968; ČIČIKOVA 1971.

10 LESHTAKOV 2009, 58; BOYADZIEV 1995, 177; DZHANFEZOVA 2018, 310; HRISTOVA 2018, 99.

11 NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, 36.

12 GUZOWSKA et al. 2002, 235; DEGER JALKOTZY – ZAVADIL 2003, 7; MOUNTJOY 2007; ASLAN – HNILA 2015, 188.

13 MOUNTJOY 1999, 296–297; BECKS – THUMM 2001, 419; BECKS 2002; BECKS 2003, 42; GÜR 2012, 57; ASLAN – HNILA 2015, 186.

14 BAŞARAN MUTLU 2019, 5.

15 DIMITROVA 2011, 73; BOZHINOVA 2012, 52, 58; NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, 17–18.

16 NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, 36.

17 HRISTOVA 2018, 112.

18 DIMITROVA 2011, 73; BOZHINOVA 2012, 51.

Settlements in the Maritsa Valley

The fertile Upper Thracian Plain in Bulgaria, watered by the Maritsa River and its tributaries, is home to many EIA settlements.¹⁹ As for the fertile areas watered by another section of the same river within the recent borders of Turkey, it is difficult to research it and identify coeval archaeological sites there because today, the Maritsa River represents a natural border between Turkey and Greece, and a large part of the study area falls within the border security zone with restricted access. Despite that, two important EIA sites, Bahçelik/Eski Kadın and Kazanova, have been identified in the valley just above the confluence of the Maritsa and Tundzha rivers (Fig. 3).

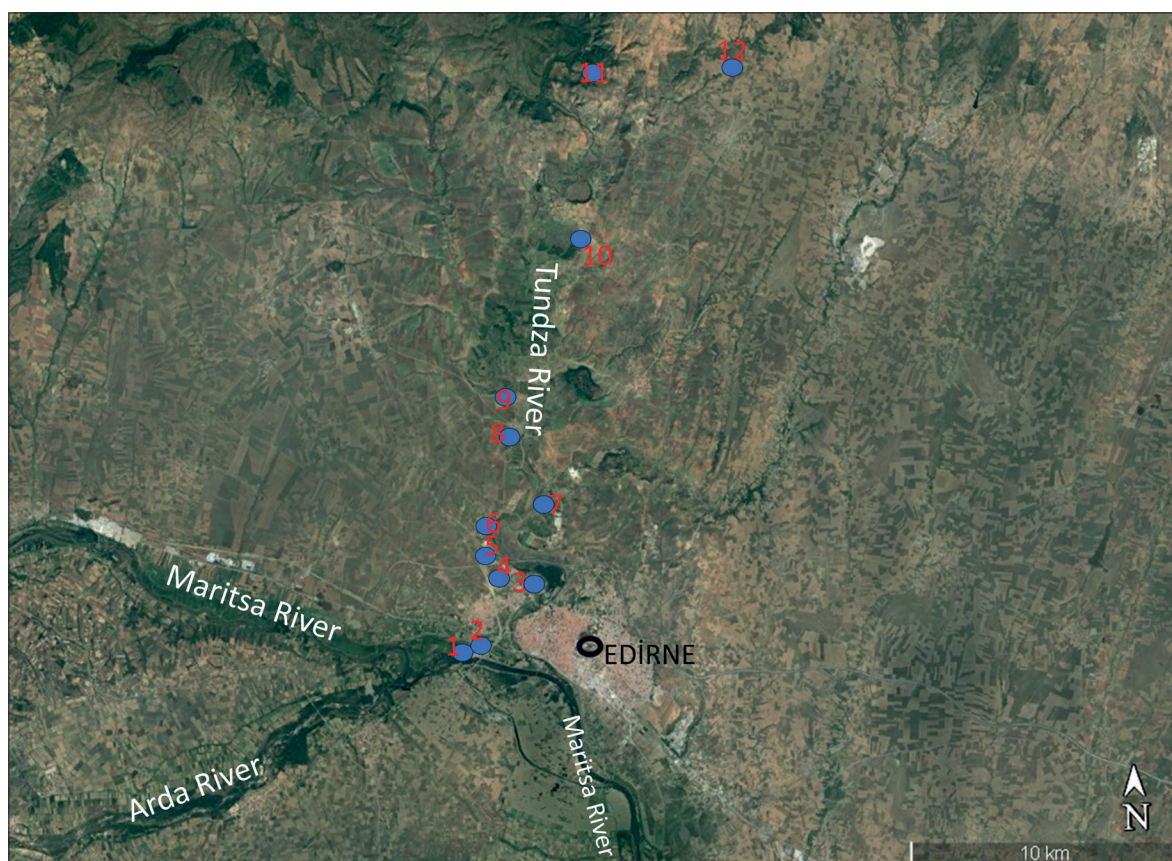


Fig. 3. Location of the investigated settlements. 1 – Eski Kadın/Bahçelik, 2 – Kazanova, 3 – Çardakaltı, 4 – Çardaklı, 5 – Hapishane, 6 – Yorulmaz Çiftliği, 7 – Köprübaşı, 8 – Adatepe, 9 – Alatepe, 10 – Gölsırtı, 11 – Suakacağı, 12 – Kokarca (source: Google Earth™).

The site known as ‘Eski Kadın’ or ‘Bahçelik’ from literature was discovered by chance in 1990, during the planting of poplars to prevent flooding in the Maritsa Basin by the State Hydraulic Works Edirne XIth Regional Directorate. The site is situated north of the Maritsa River, close to its present bed.²⁰

19 [HRISTOVA 2018](#); [NENOVA 2018](#), 124–125, 131–135.

20 According to the records of the Edirne Museum, archaeological finds have been discovered during the poplar planting works carried out by the State Hydraulic Works Edirne XI. Regional Directorate on 13.03.1990; a team from Edirne Museum made investigations on the site the exact location which is, unfortunately, unknown today. The area, marked as ‘Bahçelik’ in the records of the Regional Directorate of the Edirne Conservation Board, stretches on plots registered under No. 1191/15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 1108/1 in the Kazanova/Köşklüada area of Edirne, Central District. However, our authentication survey in 2021 did not yield any archaeological find there. Later, E. Beksaç has revealed that the area he researched and refers to in his publications as Kazanova is located approximately a kilometre south of these plots, in an area close to the Evros River, which is now within the zone under military control.

During the short archaeological investigations and excavations carried out by the Edirne Museum Directorate in 1990 and 1991 at Bahçelik/ Eski Kadın, the site was recorded as ‘a mound dating to the 2nd millennium BC (LBA, EIA).’ However, several things point to Bahçelik being an EIA cemetery rather than a mound: there is mention in the archive records of the same museum of the skeletons of an adult and a child, found during the excavations, while the pottery recovered appears to be more elaborate than ‘everyday’ vessels, their forms and stylistic characteristics indicating that they were urns or intended for social representation.

Based on the forms and especially the incised line and impressed decoration of the hand-formed pottery vessels from the site, now in the collection of the Edirne Museum, the Bahçelik cemetery was in use during EIA Phases I and II (Figs 4–5, Figs 13–15).

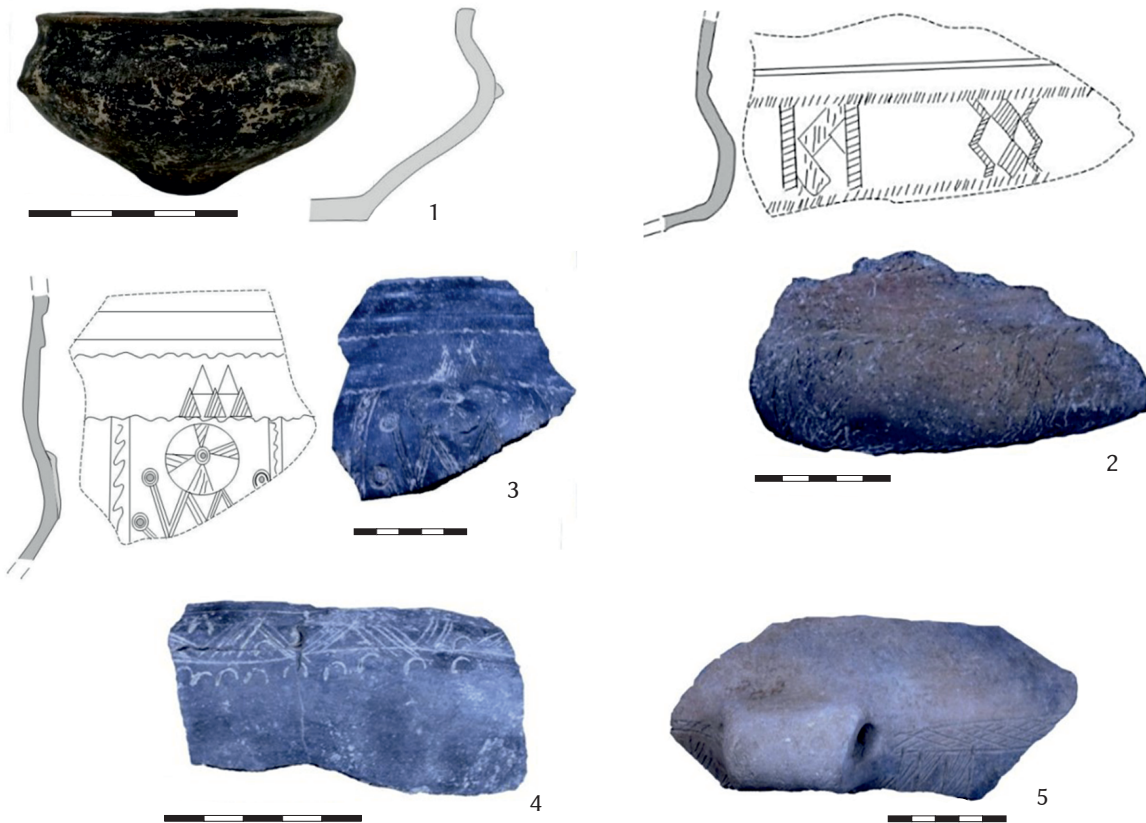


Fig. 4. 1–5 – EIA pottery from Bahçelik/Eski Kadın.

The complete bowl (Cat. BAH.2; Fig. 4.1), found during the rescue excavation, has a form a typical of the period, with a flared rim, an S-profiled body, and a short, rounded base. Based on the knobbed decoration on its body, it belongs to the ‘*Buckelkeramik*’ or ‘knobbed ware’. The bowl has a base out of the central axis of the body due to a production error; the type it represents was produced in unchanged form and clay mixture from the beginning of EIA Phase I to Phase II.

The pottery inventory of Bahçelik also includes sherds of *kantharoi* (Cat. BAH.1, 3–4; Fig. 4.2–4) similar to those found at the Manchova Mogila tumulus and the Ovcharitsa II settlement in north-eastern Thrace²¹ and other sites in northern-northeastern Thrace.²² The ceremonial vessel with a thick vertical handle (Cat. BAH.10; Fig. 4.5) has analogies among the burnished wares of the Ba-

21 HRISTOVA 2018, Fig. 5.5,7.

22 CZYBORRA 2001, Abb. 12.

badag Culture,²³ Assara,²⁴ and continental Greece.²⁵ Similar incised line decoration of the vessel surface is known from the Babadağ²⁶ and Pseničevo²⁷ cultures, as well as from the EIA settlement at Astarā.²⁸ The central medallion with hatched triangles on Cat. BAH.1 (Fig. 4.2) is typical of the Psenichevo culture,²⁹ which K. Nikov described as “exclusive to the Upper Thracian Valley”.³⁰ This motif spread north and south of the Carpathian Mountains towards the west.³¹

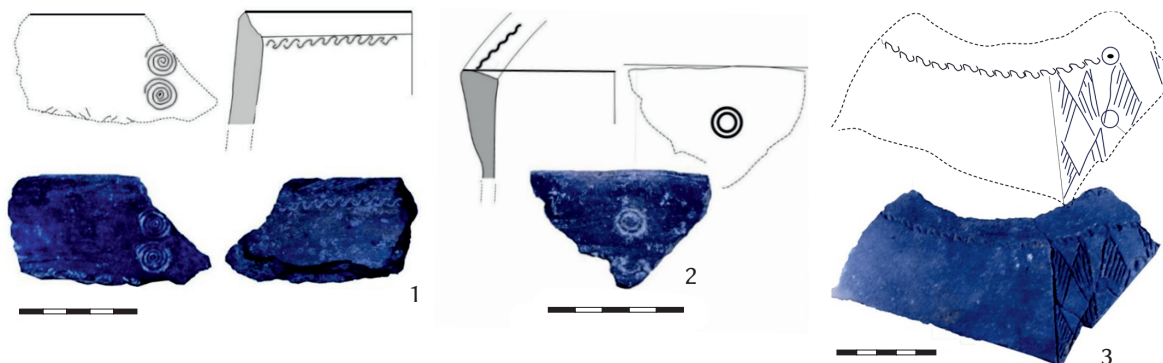


Fig. 5. 1–3 – EIA pottery from Bahçelik/Eski Kadın.

The free-standing S-scroll motif impressed on the rim and body of the vessel (Cat. ALA.3; Fig. 9.3) is common in the Insula Banuliu culture in northwestern Thrace and the eastern half of Thrace in both EIA Phases I and II.³²

Cat. BAH.3 (Fig. 4.3), a *kantharos* fragment with quite distinctive form and decoration in the pottery record of Bahçelik, draws attention with its close similarity to the long-necked *kantharoi* in Layer 10 of Kastanas, dated to the 10th–9th centuries BC. This sherd also resembles some IBA Phase I pottery³³ with channelled neck and IBA Phase II types with a body densely covered by line patterns. The form and decoration of the pottery indicate that the Bahçelik cemetery was in use between the end of EIA Phase I and the beginning of Phase II, i.e., around the 10th–9th centuries BC.

The Kazanova mound, approximately 600 m northeast of the Bahçelik cemetery, measures 170 × 260 m and has an average height of 1 m. The mound lies within the administrative borders of Kazanova/Köşklüada village, 7.5 km west of Edirne. The mound, raising above the plain at a distance of 1.30 km north of the current river, is in a flood-free zone (Fig. 6).

The surface of the mound yielded a small number find dated to the late 2nd millennium BC, abundant EIA pottery, and a small amount of Late Iron Age (LIA) materials; the latter, together with some pavers, were concentrated in the western-southwest section of the mound. Kazanova Mound

23 AILINCĂI 2011, Fig. 9.III.3.a.

24 LESHTAKOV 2004, Fig. 28.

25 PILIDES 1991, Fig. 34.

26 AILINCĂI 2011; AILINCĂI 2016b.

27 GEORGIEVA 2001, 84, Fig. 2.d, Fig. 3.c.

28 LESHTAKOV 2004, Fig. 30.

29 AILINCĂI 2020, Fig. 3.

30 NIKOV 2001, 72, Fig. 6.f.

31 CZYBORRA 2001, 269, Karte 12.

32 CZYBORRA 2001, Taf. 15.3; GEORGIEVA 2001, Fig. 3.A; AILINCĂI 2011, Fig. 117.2A.2–3; AILINCĂI 2016b, Fig. 2; NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, Fig. 7.13; AILINCĂI 2020, Fig. 3.

33 BOZHINOVA 2012.

and the cemetery of Bahçelik are part of the same geographical and cultural units. Bahçelik was likely the cemetery of Kazanova Mound, a strategically highly important site due to its position at the confluence of the Arda and Merich rivers.

Settlements in the Tundzha Valley

The Tundzha River, which irrigates a 19 km-radius area north of Edirne, has created a very fertile basin in the region. A relatively dense network of EIA settlements was identified there, with all settlements situated at a distance from the river (Fig. 3).

EIA sites line up on both sides of the river north-northeast of the city centre of Edirne; they include Köprübaşı Mound, Çardakaltı (settlement), Çardaklı Mound, Hapishane Mound, Yorulmaz Çiftliği, Ala Tepe, Ada Tepe, and Gölsirtı (settlements), as well as another settlement at Suakacağı and a cemetery at Kokarca. These sites generally consist of small agricultural settlements located on top of low ridges in the bottom of the valley, at a distance from the river; some are multi-layer mounds, while others, predominantly those starting in EIA, are single-layer flat settlements, stretching, on average, in an area of 75–150 m in diameter. The mounds usually have a cultural layer sequence of 1–4 m.³⁴

Apart from these, the multi-layer settlements of Çardakaltı and Suakacağı appear to be hillforts on top of high ridges overlooking the valley, while Kokarca is a significant EIA site established on higher ground in the Tundzha Basin, away from the floodplains; based on surface finds, it might be a cemetery.



Fig. 6. General view of Kazanova Mound (source: Google Earth™).

Köprübaşı is a prehistoric multi-layer settlement on the eastern bank of the Tundzha River, about 5 km north of Edirne; it was published first by B. Erdoğu in 1995.³⁵ The mound has an ideal setting for agriculture: it overlooks the Tundzha River in the west and the Hasanaga Stream discharging into the Tundzha River on the east and south. The area is a low mountain range, slightly elevating eastwards and rising suddenly after about 700 m, where it extends in a curve towards the southeast. This topographical diversity must have provided the residents of Köprübaşı with a natural environment optimal for small-scale cattle breeding and agriculture.

³⁴ ERDOĞU 1997, 274.

³⁵ ERDOĞU 1997, 276.

The few IBA potsherds found on the surface of the mound suggest that the settlement was in use during IBA Phases I and II. One of these sherds (Cat. KB.2; Fig. 7.1) is typical of the period:³⁶ it features interlocked spiral bands and dot row bands, rich impressed motifs known from the Pseniçevo culture³⁷ (Fig. 7, Figs 13–15).

The stoneware and the mica-tempered, splayed handle fragment with blackish-grey core and brown surface (Cat. KB.1; Fig. 7.2) represents a unique ceramic tradition known from Thrace and involving dense incised line patterns covering the outer surfaces of the vessels. The non-fortified EIA settlement at the village of Glavan in northwestern Bulgaria³⁸ has pottery with similar material, slips, and decoration. The central concentric circle on sherd Cat. KB.1 is a continuation of the sun disk symbol known from the LBA of Thrace.³⁹

Similar pottery with incised line patterns and other details indicates the existence of a ceramic tradition expanding from the cultures around Hungary to northern Thrace and the Tundzha Valley. The brown slipped ware with incised line decoration known from the Late Bronze Age Wietenberg Culture⁴⁰ became widespread in Northeastern Thrace in the Early Iron Age⁴¹ and continued the tradition in the Early Iron Age with the print decoration technique in Eastern Thrace. In Turkish Thrace, another example of this type of pottery was found in the Kokarca cemetery in the upper part of the Tundzha Valley.

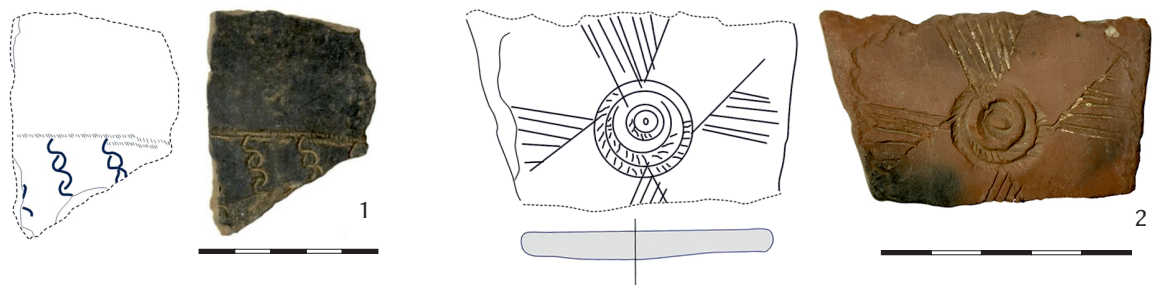


Fig. 7. 1–2 – EIA pottery from Köprübaşı Mound.

The settlement at Ala Tepe in the central part of the Tundza Valley is situated on the southern bank of a bend of the east-west flowing river, approximately 1.4 km west of the village centre of Değirmenyeni, on top of a ridge at about 150 m above the present river. While the northern and western sides of this elevation tower above the valley, the southern side of the settlement is open towards a wide plain. Therefore, Ala Tepe cannot be considered a hillfort, nor does it show the characteristics of a streamside lowland settlement, a common settlement type throughout eastern Thrace (Fig. 8).

The pottery recovered from the surface of Ala Tepe includes household vessel types that appear in a vast area in a cultural belt extending from the northwestern Balkans to Troy. The deeply incised and impressed vessel decorations follow EIA Phase I and II pottery traditions in both Thrace and southern Romania.

Cat. ALA.9 (Fig. 9.7) represents a vessel type known to originate from the MBA Wietenberg culture in the north; it spread towards the north and south in the EIA, developing minor variations but retaining its general formal characteristics. Nevertheless, the main developmental route of the form

36 HOREJS 2007a; HOREJS 2007b, 226, Ornamentkatalog, Teil 1.33,37.

37 AILINCĂI 2020, Fig. 3.173.

38 GEORGIEVA 2001, Fig. 2.d.

39 HRISTOVA 2018, Fig. 10.1,7.

40 BERECKI 2009, 93, Pl. 2.1.

41 HRISTOVA 2011a, Fig. 6.

is in the LBA cultures of the Eastern Rhodopes and the Carpatians.⁴² This form with a wide base, with close analogies in the EIA pottery of Transdanubia in Hungary⁴³ and Cozia in Romania,⁴⁴ also appears at Troy.⁴⁵

Cat. ALA.11 (Fig. 9.8) is the rim sherd of a storage vessel or bowl representing a household vessel type⁴⁶ widely used from Thrace to the Eastern Mediterranean and Troy during the LBA and EIA. While the basic form is common, the incised wave motif adorning the wide, flat rim is typical of its LBA and EIA variants in Thrace and the pottery of the nearby cultures; however, the independent, bevelled S-scroll rows on the inner side of the rim⁴⁷ clearly indicate that the vessel should be dated to the EIA Phase I or II.



Fig. 8. Western view of Ala Tepe (settlement).

Pottery with deep incised lozenges and zigzag line bundles was collected from the surfaces of the EIA settlements of Thrace and Troy.⁴⁸ Similar ware is also known from northwest⁴⁹ and southeast Bulgaria,⁵⁰ the Thracian site of Malkoto Kale on the western Black Sea coast,⁵¹ and Diadovo, a Thracian site on the western Black Sea coast in northwestern Bulgaria.⁵² A vessel with similar patterns, exhibited in the Sofia Museum and apparently from the Haskovo region, was dated to the 8th–6th centuries BC, which corroborates the dating of the lozenge- and zigzag line bundle-decorated sherds from Ala Tepe to EIA Phase II.

Based on the impressed S-scroll rows on some vessels⁵³ and the cord impressions hanging from a concentric circle observed on vessels mostly in the Pseniçevo culture and eastern Thrace,⁵⁴ the Ala Tepe settlement was intensively used during EIA Phase I and especially Phase II (Fig. 9, Figs 13–15).

42 NENOVA 2018, 203, 164, Pl. 14.a; SAVA 2019, Pl. 4.9.

43 GROMA 2015, 147, Abb. 5.16.

44 AILINCĂI 2020, Fig. 2.86.

45 HNILA 2012, Pl. 201.531.

46 PILIDES 1991, Fig. 26.1:20,21, Fig. 35.1:20; DIMITROVA 2011, Fig. 5.1; HNILA 2012, Pl. 199.806, Fig. 201.1078.

47 CZYBORRA 2001, Taf. 15.3; PINTÉR 2005, 198, Nr. CH.2.

48 DIMITROVA 2011, Fig. 2.1; HNILA 2012, Pl. 201.1201, Pl. 203.

49 GEORGIEVA 2001, Fig. 3.e; HRISTOVA 2018, Fig. 16.7.

50 CZYBORRA 2001, Taf. 27.10; NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, Fig. 8.6.

51 CZYBORRA 2001, Taf. 23.5,7.

52 HRISTOVA 2018, Fig. 16.7.

53 CZYBORRA 2001, Taf. 15.3; AILINCĂI 2016a; AILINCĂI 2020.

54 CZYBORRA 2001, Taf. 20.7.

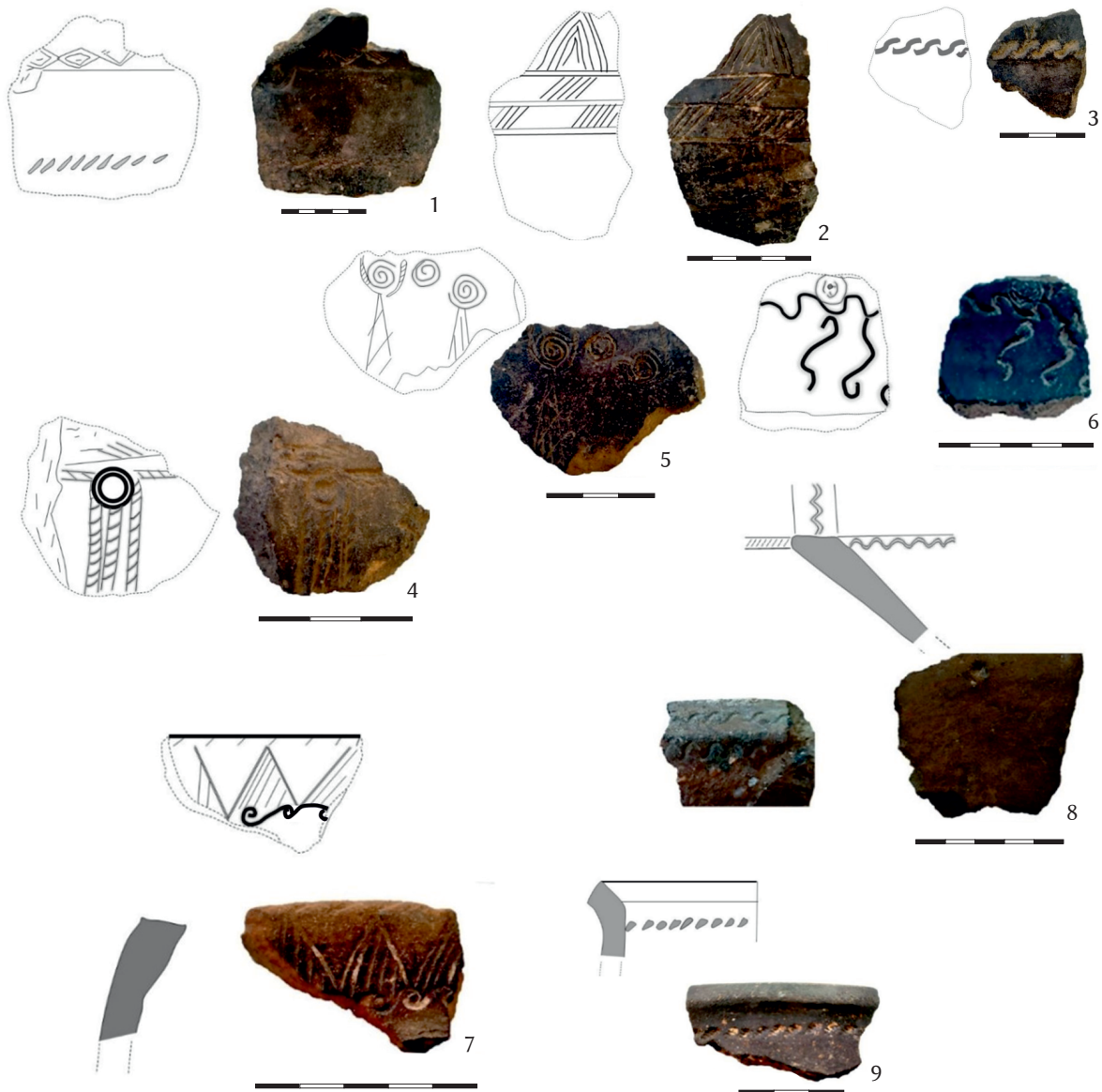


Fig. 9. 1–8 – EIA pottery from Ala Tepe (settlement), 9 – Gölsırtı (settlement).

Conclusively, Ala Tepe, with its wide plains dominating the valley, was a flourishing major settlement during the EIA, especially between the 11th and 8th centuries BC. The wheel-thrown pottery with a light grey core and slipped surfaces in the record of the site suggests that the settlement remained inhabited in the phase after EIA. The dark grey to light grey material of an impressed potsherd from the surface is very important because it suggests that the ware emerging after the Aeolian Age and identified as Aeolian Grey and Archaic Grey evolved from the blackish-dark grey EIA ware.

Another EIA settlement was identified at Gölsırtı between the villages of Yolüstü and Hatıpköy in Edirne in the upper reaches of the Tundzha Basin in Turkish Thrace. It is stretching on a wide and about 1.25 km long, north-south ridge approximately 1 km away from the present bed of the Tundzha River and rising approximately 60–70 m above the plain. The ridge forms a crescent facing the riverbed in a way which suggests that there used to be a lake between the ridge and the river (as a matter of fact, the name of the place also refers to that; Fig. 10).

The surface of the extensive ploughlands on the 1 × 1 km elevation at Gölsırtı is covered with scattered EIA pottery, suggesting a large settlement or several small ones which overlooked the lake in ancient times.

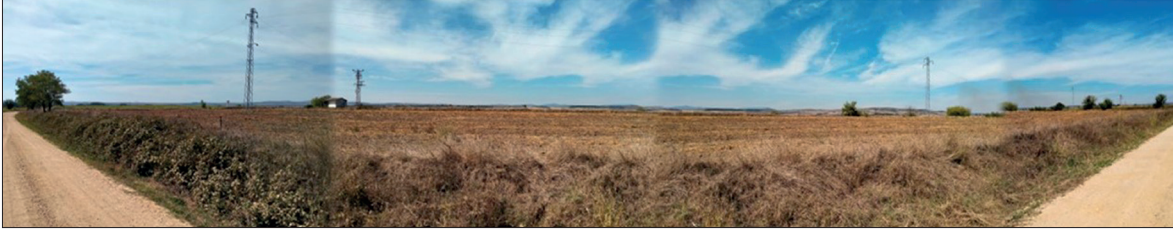


Fig. 10. General view of Gölsirtı (settlement).

Based on surface finds, the settlement(s) at Gölsirtı seem to have had their heyday during LBA Phase II. However, the form and fluted decoration of the neck fragment of a cup found there resemble a vessel from the tumulus at Taşlıcabayır, dated to the LBA/EIA transition. Although this type persisted into EIA, it can be assumed that Gölsirtı is contemporary with Taşlıcabayır. Cat. GS.6 (Fig. 9.9) was also dated to the LBA–EIA transition, both at Gluhite Kamani and in the Morova Valley.⁵⁵

The decoration, form, and material of some pottery from the site indicate a local preference for the products of workshops that also supplied other EIA settlements such as the neighbouring Ala Tepe.

The pottery collected from the surface includes household types: tableware (vessels for eating and drinking) and storage vessels. Some tableware types have analogies in the EIA Phase I levels of the Ovcharitsa II settlement in northeastern Thrace,⁵⁶ while the storage vessel types include forms known from the LBA and EIA of Transdanubia and the southwestern Carpathians,⁵⁷ reflecting the intensive distance exchange connections between these regions.

The vessels with incised zigzag line bundle decoration also appear at the nearby Ala Tepe; the type resembles a variant with shallow incisions from the LBA–EIA transitional phase.⁵⁸ The deep incision observed on some pottery from Ala Tepe is also present on EIA sites in various parts of Thrace and in Troy VIIb2.⁵⁹

The pottery with cord-impressed zigzag patterns and lines and intertwined impressed circles amongst the surface finds is evidence of an intensive inhabitation of the Gölsirtı settlement during EIA Phase I and especially Phase IIA.

Kokarca site, situated northeast of Tundzha Valley, along one of its tributaries, is located between Tuğlalık and Hamzabeyli villages in Lalapaşa District of Edirne province.

Since it was almost completely destroyed by an irrigation pond constructed sometime in the recent past, the character of the site cannot be determined with certainty. However, the fact that the few potsherds recovered are of high quality, suitable for ceremonial rather than daily use, leads us to believe that the site was an EIA cemetery.

For example, Cat. KOK. 1 (Fig. 11.1) must be a fragment of a *crater*, a ceremonial vessel. The cord-impressed diagonal lines, concentric circles, vertical hooked S-scroll rows and chevrons also appear on EIA Phase I pottery at Insula Banuliu, Babadagh, and in southeastern and northern Thrace⁶⁰ (Fig. 11, Figs 13–15), while analogies to the slip are known from the LBA Wietenberg Culture.⁶¹ However,

55 BULATOVIC 2007, Pl. 3.19.

56 HRISTOVA 2018, 100, Fig. 13.

57 BERCIU 1967, no. 53; BERCIU 1967, Abb. 5.12; AILINCĂI 2020, Fig. 2.39.

58 BULATOVIC 2007, Pl. 3.21.

59 DIMITROVA 2011, Fig. 2.1; HNILA 2012, Pl. 201.1201, Pl. 203.

60 LAZAR 2011, 386, 387; AILINCĂI 2016a, 335.

61 BERECKI 2009, 93, Pl. 2.1.

the thin cord-impressed motifs can be traced back to the MBA of the northwestern Balkans.⁶² The respective vessel types, with similar material and slip but new patterns, became widespread in northeastern and eastern Thrace in the EIA.⁶³ Based on that, this pottery, similar to the Köprübaşı finds, can be dated to between the 11th and 8th centuries BC.

A vessel with a unique form and an impressed checkerboard pattern (Fig. 11.2), also represents a type that is rare in the region. Similar types can be found in the M/LBA Wietenberg culture,⁶⁴ the EIA Babadağ culture,⁶⁵ and Troy, where such vessels were used as a mug, a double-handled drinking vessel, or a *pyksis*-like gift vessel. In terms of shape and decoration, the closest analogy of Cat. KOK.2 from Kokarca is an example found at Luduş, a Wietenberg culture site in Transylvania and dated to the mid-2nd millennium BC;⁶⁶ besides, vessels with similar but incised decoration are known from the EIA settlement of Kozia-Sharna in northeastern Thrace.⁶⁷

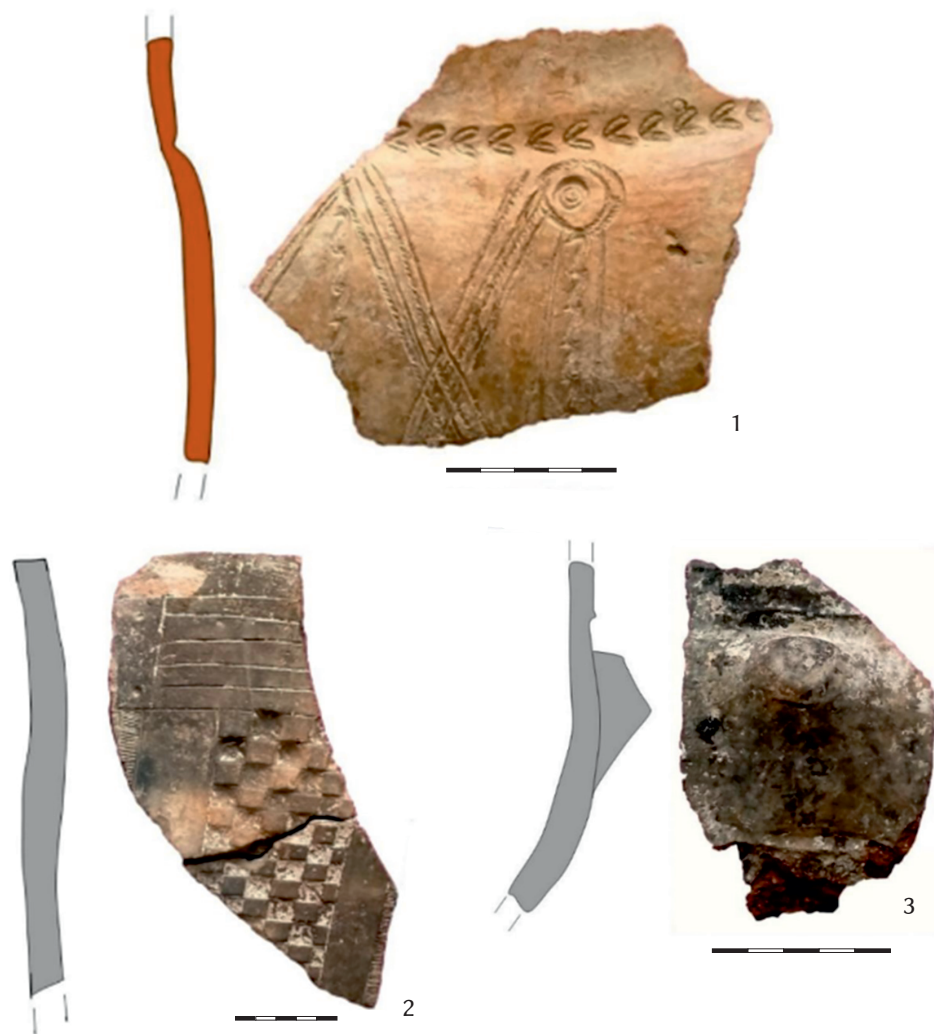


Fig. 11. 1–3 – LBA–EIA pottery from Kokarca.

62 BĂLAN *et al.* 2016, 153, Pl. 16.

63 GEORGIEVA 2001, Fig. 2.d; HRISTOVA 2011a, Fig. 6.49; HRISTOVA 2011b, Fig. 6.1.

64 BĂLAN 2014, 31, Pl. 13.4; BERECKI 2016, 90, Pl. 30.1.

65 AILINCĂI 2016a, Fig. 15.43; AILINCĂI 2020, Fig. 2.24.

66 BERECKI 2016, 90, Pl. 30.1.

67 KASHUBA 2000, Ris. 36.



Fig. 12. Regional vessel forms, typological overview.

The button-shaped relief ornament on the surface of a vessel fragment (Fig. 11.3) is a decorative element appearing in the Balkans and northwestern Anatolia from the EIA on. Its variants are known from Chokoba in northern⁶⁸ and Vratitsa in northwestern Bulgaria,⁶⁹ as well as from LBA vessels in northern Greece⁷⁰ and the body of a jar from the LBA/EIA-transition Level II of Ada Tepe in Bulgaria,⁷¹ representing a continuation of the tradition in the Eastern Rhodopes.

These few finds prove that the site at Kokarca was in use during the LBA, a phase otherwise not known in Eastern Thrace, and persisted until the EIA.

The Dolmen Culture in the northern part of Tundza Valley in Turkish Thrace

The area where the Tundzha Valley enters Turkey is the western end of the Strandzha Mountains. This low mountain range, with its highest point at 1,031 m a.s.l., is home to dolmens, one of the most important elements of the EIA megalithic burial tradition in Thrace.

Dolmens are constructed by erecting large flat blocks, several metres high, vertically or tilted towards each other and covering them with similar stone slabs. Thracian dolmens comprise one or two chambers and sometimes a porch; their perimeters have been engirded with a course of stones. Some were covered with soil or stones; it is a question, however, whether all dolmens were finished this way.⁷²

Dolmens are thought to be the burial places of powerful persons in the region, also special funerary monuments for a heroic ancestor each, and cult centres.⁷³ These places are also believed to have been preferred venues of ceremonies related to the belief in rebirth when the moon and sunlight enter the dolmen during the times of equinox.⁷⁴

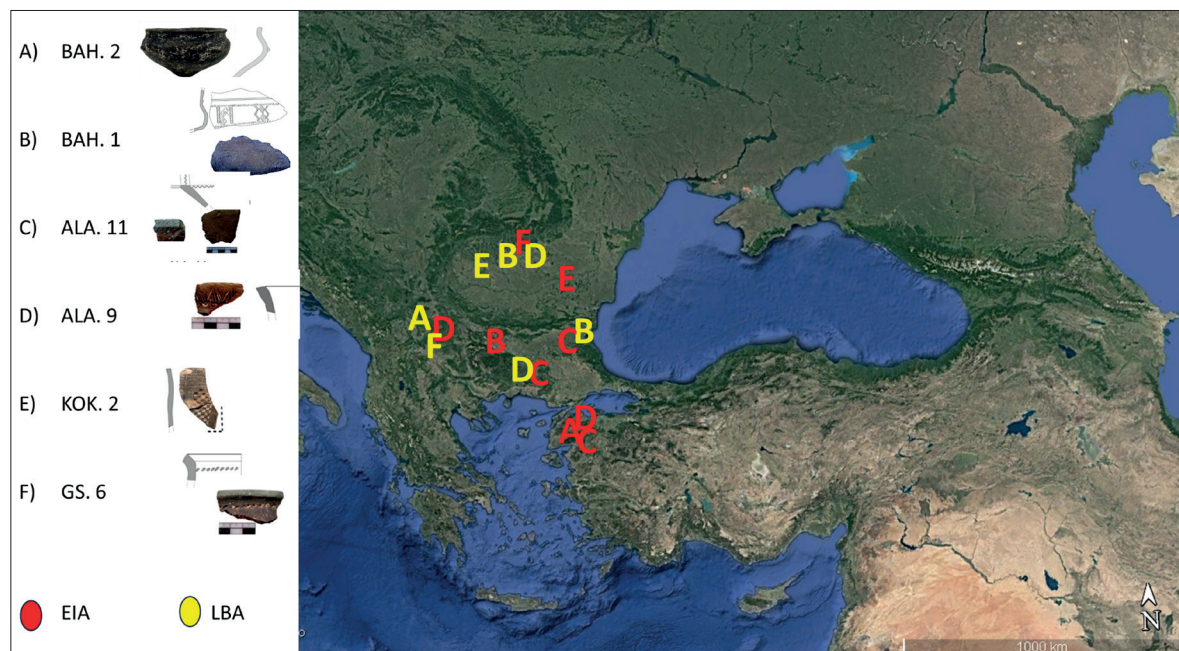


Fig. 13. Regional vessel forms, distribution map (source: Google Earth™).

68 HRISTOVA 2018, Fig. 3.1.

69 HRISTOVA 2011a, Fig. 3.6; NENOVA 2019, 13.e.

70 HEURTLEY – RADFORD 1928, 134, Fig. 13.

71 NEKHRIZOV – TZVETKOVA 2018, Fig. 3.12.

72 POZZI 2009, 8.

73 A2PE 2005, 104.

74 POZZI 2009, 8, 101; BEKSAÇ 2007, 185.

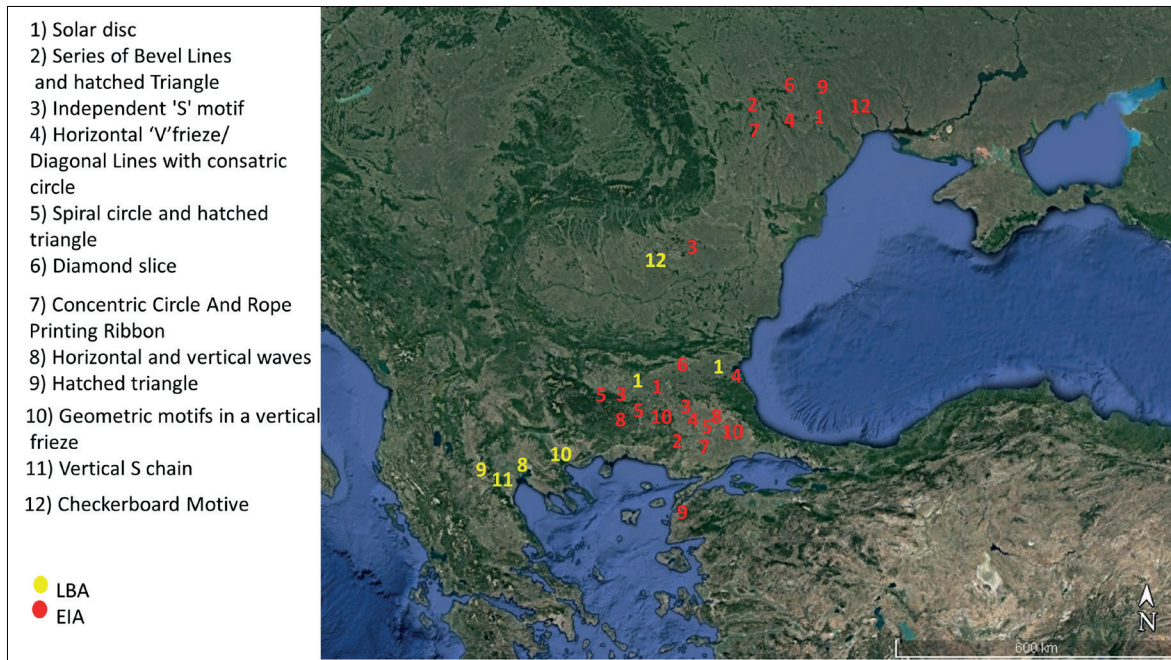


Fig. 14. Regional vessel decorations, typological overview (source: Google Earth™).

Throughout Thrace, dolmen tombs appear in the mountainous regions of northern Greece, the Eastern Rhodope Mountains and Mount Sakar in Bulgaria, and the Strandzha Mountains in Turkey. As the result of surveys carried out in the 1980s, 118 dolmens were identified in Turkish Thrace.⁷⁵ Although the dolmens in Turkey and Bulgaria feature some regional differences, their general characteristics are similar.⁷⁶

Dolmens were also found on natural terraces on the mountain slopes on the outskirts of Hamza-beyli and Tuğlalık villages in the northern of the part of the Tundza Valley in Turkey; their number increases in the eastern parts of the Strandza Mountains.

Conclusions

Like many valleys in Eastern Thrace, the ones watered by the two biggest rivers in the region are characterised by a densely network of EIA settlements. The macro-scale view of the Maritsa (Meriç) and Tundzha (Tunca) valleys provides insight into the settlement typology and distribution in the region during the EIA. The find material suggests a remarkable level of standardisation in this period, while the scatter of the identified sites reflects a preference of certain settings, mostly different kinds of elevations, for settling. Many settlements are situated on slight elevations along the fertile valleys, on top of a flood-free embankment, terrace, or promontory at a distance of 30–800 m from the river.

Another setting preferred by EIA settlers in eastern Thrace was the plateaus of high hills; such settlements are very rare in valleys. Çardakaltı near the lower end and Suakacağı in the upper part of the Tundzha Valley are EIA hillforts.

Although Çardakaltı, about 120 m above the river, has been destroyed almost completely, it seems to have been a hillfort; the first settlement on the site was established during the Late Neolithic.⁷⁷

75 ÖZDOĞAN 1982; ÖZDOĞAN 1983; ÖZDOĞAN 1985; ÖZDOĞAN 1986.

76 BEKSAÇ 2006, 283; NEKHRIZOV 2015, 127.

77 KANSU 1963.

Suakacağı is located at Karatoprak Mevkii, about 200 m northwest of the village of the same name, on a wide slope overlooking the Tundzha River and raising above it by about 100 m. Based on the scarcity of pottery on its surface and topographical setting, the settlement of Suakacağı was a fortified and strategically important fortress that remained in use from the end of the 2nd millennium BC until the end of the Antiquity.

The EIA hillforts characterised through the two examples presented above must have been administrative centres for the village-type settlements located in the valleys under them, residences for the (elite of the) tribe dominating the valley, and also refuges in case of occasional attacks.

It is difficult to determine the area of a settlement hillfort without excavation. Based on satellite images and aerial photographs, the settlement of Suakacağı, which has no visible architectural remains on its surface, covered a 60 × 40 m area and was surrounded by an irregular circular wall (Fig. 15).

Nothing on the surfaces of Suakacağı and Çardakaltı indicates stone fortifications. Although it is difficult to formulate a specific suggestion without excavation, these fortified settlements likely were defended by wattled post-framed and mudbrick walls. Similar fortifications have been envisaged as the result of archaeological investigations in similar settlements in various regions of the Balkans.⁷⁸



Fig. 15. 3D view of Suakacağı hillfort.

Although the EIA inhabitation of the region is characterised mainly by simple farming settlements concentrating in the bottom of the valleys and some hillforts overlooking them, traces of coeval occupation have also been found in special settings like the foothill region and caves outside the valleys. Pekmezdere Cave in Pınarhisar district centre of Kırklareli province is a good example.⁷⁹ However, these areas were the venues of cultic activities rather than daily life.

To what extent was the dolmen culture, intensively present on the mountain slopes in the northern parts of the Tundzha Valley but not in parts far from the mountains, like the Maritsa Valley, related to the settlements along this valley? It is extremely difficult to say anything definite on that. The dolmens, recognised by some researchers as sacred sites or tombs, were perhaps used by the tribes living in the settlements in the valley. However, considering that the dolmens only appear in a part of the eastern Thrace, along a line above the Strandzha (Istranca/Yıldız) Mountains, it seems more likely that the northern and southern halves of the region (the latter including the lowlands and the mountainous parts clustered around the Saroz Bay) were dominated in the EIA by tribes with different religious identities. Perhaps a separate social structure, similar to today's ethnological

78 BULATOVIĆ – FILIPOVIĆ 2017, 153; MARTA 2017, 180; SCHUSSMANN 2017.

79 BEKSAÇ 2009, 182–183; DOĞAN 2023, 409.

structure existed in the Strandzha Mountains (representing the northern fringes of the region), to whom the use of dolmens was specific. This question can only be answered by detailed ‘settlement’ research carried out in the dolmen area.

This paper is an attempt to broadly outline the EIA cultural development of the region by evaluating available data on settlements in the valleys of the Tundzha and Maritsa rivers, the two biggest watercourses in eastern Thrace; however, it has also revealed that such a study requires much more extensive research.

Catalogue

BAH.2. Bowl. Core 5YR4/6, tempered with grit and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside GLEY1-3/N, matte, burnished; outside GLEY1-3/N, matte, shiny (Fig. 4.1).⁸⁰

BAH.1. Kantharos. Core VLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with some fine gravel and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside GLEY1-2,5/N, shiny, burnished; outside 7,5YR-5/4, shiny, burnished (Fig. 4.2).

BAH.3. Kantharos. Core VLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with a lot of gravel and little mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside GLEY1-2,5/N, shiny, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, shiny, burnished (Fig. 4.3).

BAH.4. Kantharos (?). Core 7,5YR-4/4, tempered with some fine gravel and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside GLEY1-3/N, matte, burnished; outside 10YR-5/1, shiny, burnished (Fig. 4.4).

BAH.10. Por. Core 10YR-4/2, tempered with some gravel and mica, fired at high temperature. With a flecked surface; inside 7,5YR-4/1, rough, burnished; outside 7,5YR-6/2, matte, burnished (Fig. 4.5).

BAH.7. Bowl. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside 10YR-6/2, shiny, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, shiny, burnished (Fig. 5.1).

BAH.8. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, highly tempered with gravel and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside GLEY1-2,5/N, shiny, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 5.2).

BAH.11. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside GLEY1-3/N shiny, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, shiny, burnished (Fig. 5.3).

KB.2. Plate. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 7.1).

KB.1. Handle. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside 7,5YR-5/4, unburnished; outside 7,5YR-5/4, unburnished (Fig. 7.2).

ALA.1. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at high temperature. GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 9.1).

ALA.2. Vessel. Core 7,5YR-3/1, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside 7,5YR-3/1, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 9.2).

ALA.3. Vessel. Core VLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside 10YR-4/1, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 9.3).

ALA.4. Bowl. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 9.4).

ALA.5. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside 10YR-5/2; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 9.5).

ALA.8. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside 10YR-4/1; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished (Fig. 9.6).

ALA.9. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside 7,5YR-5/3; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished; d = 9,5 cm (Fig. 9.7).

ALA.11. Vessel. Core GLEY1-3/N–7,5YR-4/4, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside 7,5YR-4/3, burnished; outside 7,5YR-5/4, burnished; d = 40 cm (Fig. 9.8).

80 The colours were determined according to the Munsell soil color chart: *Munsell Soil Color Charts: With Genuine Munsell Color Chips*. Grand Rapids, MI, 2010.

GS.6. Vessel. Core GLEY1-2,5/N, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at medium temperature. Inside GLEY1-2,5/N; outside GLEY1-2,5/N, burnished; d = 28 cm. (Fig. 9.9).

KOK.1. Crater(?). Core 2,5YR-6/1, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside 7,5YR-4/6, burnished, matte; outside 2,5YR-5/4, shiny, burnished (Fig. 11.1).

KOK.2. Ceremonial vessel/pyxis(?). Core 2,5YR-6/6, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside 2,5YR-3/1, roughly burnished, matte; outside 2,5YR-3/1, burnished, matte, mottled (Fig. 11.2).

KOK.4. Ceremonial vessel(?). Core 2,5YR-3/6, tempered with gravel, sand, and mica, fired at high temperature. Inside 7,5YR-6/3, burnished, matte; outside 2,5YR-3/1, burnished, matte, mottled (Fig. 11.3).

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