Avian Remains from the Late Chalcolithic Settlement near Hotnitsa Village (Veliko Tarnovo Region, CN Bulgaria)

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Abstract: Fourteen bird bone remains (MNI=11), of 6 orders, 7 families and 8 species, dated ca. 7000 BP of Cygnus olor, Tetrao tetrix, Gallus gallus domesticus, Gypaetus barbatus, Circus aeruginosus, Columba palumbus, and Pica pica have been identified. Hotnitsa is the 3rd site in Bulgaria proving the existence of poultry-breeding in the Chalcolithic-Early-Bronze-Age period. Game fowling, along the poultry-breeding, played an important role in the life of the inhabitants of the settlement. The ecological preferences in relation to the nesting habitats and the sites for feeding of the species indicate, that in the vicinity of the settlement were spread openland grassy terrains of scattered shrubs, mixed deciduous woods, wetlands (swamps, lakes and river floods), as well as rocky habitats.

Key words: Chalcolithic birds, Holocene avian remains, Bulgaria, Archaeozoology, early poultry-breeding, gamefowl

Introduction

Location: The archaeological site near Hotnitsa (UTM grid: LH87) is located in Orlovka locality at ca. 200 m a. s. l. at Tarnovski Visochini Hills (43-06’00”N; 25-38’00”E), 15 km NW of the town of Veliko Tarnovo, CN Bulgaria).

Excavations: The excavations of the site started in 1956-1959 by N. ANGELOV. Studied material of this paper was collected during the 1990s by a team leaded by Dr. Stefan Chohadzhiev (Veliko Tarnovo University ‘St. St. Cyril and Methodius), and dated Late Chalcolithic.

Cultural interrelationships: The site belongs to a large number (over 80) prehistoric settlements in the region, all referred to the s. c. Hotnitsa Culture type (VELKOV 1982; TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993). Earlier TODOROVA (1979) referred its culture to Polyaniitsa IV Culture type. The height of the local culture is referred to Chalcolithic (5th to 4th millennium BC). Uncovered artifacts proved it’s belonging to the earliest civilization in Europe. Population was settled, resident, and its farm was based on the agriculture and the livestock husbandry, supplemented by the hunting, fishing and fruit gathering. The famous Hotnitsa gold treasure deserves special mentioning, because it reveals the traditional contacts to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the trans-Danubian regions. In the 4th millennium BC nomad tribes, arrived from North, presently named protothracian, lead to the resident population of Hotnitsa settlement mound undoing. The culture, followed the Hornitsa Culture, in the next 800 years developed as transitional, from which later derived the highly developed Thracian Culture (WIKIPEDIA 2008).

Associated fauna: Mammalia: Spermophilus citellus, Castor fiber, Lepus europaeus, Bos primigenius, Felis silvestris, Lynx lynx, Canis lupus, Vulpes vulpes, Mustela putorius, Martes foina, Equus caballus, Canis familiaris, Cervus elaphus, Capreolus