The recent publication of results from large-scale excavations in sub-Balkan Thrace marks an important step forward in Bulgarian archaeology, and has finally provided us with objective scientific data on the geo-political status quo and ethnic composition in this part of Europe in the late Iron Age. These extensive excavations, carried out at a number of sites in Central Bulgaria, especially in the Chirpan Heights area, has yielded material that has prompted local archaeologists to finally conclude that in the late Iron Age this region was in fact inhabited by a Celtic (Celtic-Thracian) population (Tonkova et al 2011 = Трако-римски династичен център в районна Чирпанските възвишения. Тонкова М. (ed.) София, 2011).

Celtic ‘Zepino Type’ ceramic from Bratya Daskalovi, Stara Zagora reg., south-central Bulgaria

(After Tonkova et al 2011)
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

Previously recorded Celtic material from the sub-Balkan area of Central Bulgaria is extensive, ranging from Sofia eastwards, from the Celtic warrior burial complete with a (ritually bent) La Tène sword, spear and Celtic ceramic discovered in the Poduaine area of Sofia City at the beginning of the 20th c. (Кацаров Г., България в древността. Историко-археологически очерк. Популярна археологическа библиотека, No. 1. София 1926. P. 41) to the concentration of Celtic material discovered in the Gorna Malina district of eastern Sofia region, where La Tène material has been...
found at the villages of Markazevo, Gorna Malina itself, and at Bailovo (see ‘Sacrificial Daggers’ and ‘Serdi’ articles’, with cited lit.). Among these finds one should mention the La Tène B2 sword from Bailovo, the earliest Celtic sword yet found in Bulgaria, and therefore relating chronologically to the first stage of Celtic migration into this part of the Balkans, and a Celtic shield of the Karaburma type from Gorna Malina (loc cit).

Further to the east, one encounters the massive amount of La Tène material discovered at the Panagurischt Kolonii site (Pazardjik region). At the tumulus necropolis at this site, dated to the 2nd – 1st c. BC, 30 tumuli have been excavated. Material from the burials included La Tène swords, scabbards, spearheads, curved daggers, horse-bits, curved daggers, iron and bronze Celtic fibulae, and bronze appliqué from chain-mail from the male graves, while the female burials (circa 30%) typically contained pottery, bracelets, fibulae and other jewelry (Domaradski 1984:136; on Celtic chainmail from Bulgaria see ‘Chainmail’ article). Also noteworthy are finds of Celtic steckverschlüsse torcs from the site, similar examples of which have been found at a number of other sites in Bulgaria such as Sevtopolis (Kazanlak), Komarevo (Vratza region), Kalnovo (Schumen region) (see also ‘New Celtic Material 2’ article), Viskiar (Pernik region) and Malkoto Kale (near Ravadinovo, Burgas region) (Domaradski op cit:140).

This trail of Celtic material in Central Bulgaria continues along the Maritza/Hebros river valley with the La Tène material (weaponry, fibulae etc.) recorded at the Pisteros site, a Macedonian fortress destroyed during the initial Celtic migration at the beginning of the 3rd c. BC (Bouzek J., Celtic Campaigns in Southern Thrace and the Tylis Kingdom: The Duchov fibula in Bulgaria and the destruction of Pisteros in 279/ 8. In: Dobranska H., Megaw V., Poleska P. (eds.) Celts on the margin. Studies in European cultural interaction. 7th century BC – 1st c AD. Krakow. 93-101). Further along the Maritza one may mention the Celtic warrior burial(s) excavated in the centre of Philipopolis/Plovdiv (see ‘Killing the Objects’ article), and other Celtic material including the Celtic burial with late La Tène sword/scabbard from Belozem (Plovdiv region) (Peev 1926 = Пеев А., Разкопка на Горната Могила при с. Белозем. – ГПНБ (Годишник на Нар. Библиотека Пловдив), 1926. 65-68); another Late La Tène sword from Kruschevo (Plovdiv region) (Domaradski, 1984, 142); a Celtic burial including a late La Tène sword / scabbard from Stara Zagora (1st. c. AD – Буюклиев Х., Димитров М. Николов Д., Стара Загора. София 1965:134); and a Celtic burial including a further late La Tène sword from Merichleri (Dimitrovgrad district, Haskovo region) (Domaradski, 1984, 132/142) – an extensive trail of La Tène material which stretches along the Maritza river valley to the Celtic chariot burial at Mezek (also Haskovo region) (see ‘The Mezek Syndrome’), near the Bulgarian/Turkish border.

This archaeological material is logically complemented by Celtic numismatic evidence from the same region. This includes Celtic coinage of the same types as recently found at the Chirpan Heights excavations (Philip III and Thasos models – see below). Hoards of such finds have been recorded in the eastern Sofia region at the villages of Vrachesh, close to the aforementioned concentration of Celtic archaeological material around the Gorna Malina area, Churek (a massive hoard containing over 7 kg. of silver Celtic ‘Thasos’ issues), and Chavdar, the latter near the aforementioned Celtic burial site/settlement at Panagurischt Kolonii (see Numismatics sections 1, 2 and 4; also ‘Little Metal Men’ article, with relevant lit.). Further Celtic hoards have been recorded along the Maritza river at Ognyanovo in the Pazardjik region (bronze Strymon/Trident type – see Numismatics section 6), Krumevo, Choba, Plovdiv, and Topalovo (all Plovdiv region), Benkovski,
Kolyo Marinovo, Bratya Daskalovi, Medovo, Naidenovo, and Zetovo (Stara Zagora region), stretching to Dolno Botevo, Haskovo, Gorno Pole, Levka and Mezek (all Haskovo region) (Numismatics sections 1, 2 and 4, with cited lit.), clearly indicating that the Maritza/Hebrus river was a major trade artery during the Celtic period (3-1st c. BC).

The heavy concentration in the western Stara Zagora region with finds at Bratya Daskalovi (see below), Kolyo Marinovo, Medovo and Naidenovo, indicates that this area was a major Celtic economic and coin production centre in the immediate pre-Roman period.

CHIRPAN HEIGHTS

To this extensive numismatic and archaeological material we may now add the evidence from the Chirpan Heights area, where the recent excavations have uncovered Celtic burials, jewelry, ceramic etc. Worthy of special mention is the rich central Celtic burial (#10) from the Karakochovata Tumulus (Bratya Daskalovi) (Tonkova et al 2011) which included a wealth of grave goods including needles, fibulae, knives, silver earrings, a silver necklace, Celtic pottery of the ‘Zepino’ type (on the distribution of this type of Celtic pottery in Thrace see ‘Zoomorphic Cult Firepots’ article), a bronze La Tène fibula of the Jezerine type, as well as the Celtic numismatic material outlined below.

Remains of the Funeral Pyre from the Central Celtic Burial (#10) at Karakochovata Tumulus (Bratya Daskalovi) (after Tonkova et al 2011)
Recent finds of Celtic ceramic of this type in Thrace include examples from the Unatzi site (Pazardjik reg.), also in central Bulgaria, which was again found together with a bronze La Tène fibula of the Jezerine type (loc cit), and from the Celtic chieftain’s burial at Sashova Tumulus near the Shipka Pass, where this type of Celtic ‘Cult’ ceramic was discovered together with a gold fibula, torc, Celtic sword, etc. (op. cit.; see also ‘Zoomorphic Cult Firepots’ and ‘Behind the Golden Mask’ articles).
Silver Celtic earring from the central burial at Karakochovata Tumulus

Bronze La Tène Fibula of the Jezerine type from the central Celtic burial at Karakochovata Tumulus.
The Jezerine fibula is of great importance for the dating of the complex. This type of late La Tène fibula first appears between 40-30 BC and is most common in the period between 30 and 10 BC (Rustoiu A. Fibulele din Dacia Preromana (sec. I i.e.n. – I e.n. Bucuresti 1997). It is worth noting that the jewelry from the burial is of types typical of the Scordisci and other Balkan Celts during this period (Tonkova op cit), and that this La Tène fibula was found together with Celtic ‘Zepino Type’ ceramic, and the Celtic coins presented below.

**CULTURAL CHRONOLOGY**

Besides the material presented above, the clearest illustration of the geo-political status quo in this area of Thrace in the late Iron Age (previously referred to as the ‘late Hellenistic Period’) is to be observed in an analysis of the ancient coinage discovered during the recent excavations. This numismatic evidence falls into 3 clear chronological and cultural groups:

Macedonian and Thraco-Macedonian royal coinage (4th c. BC – circa 281 BC). This consists of coinage of the Macedonian kings Lysimachus, and the Thraco-Macedonian ruler Seuthes III:

![Bronze issue of the Thracian ruler Seuthes III from Bratya Daskalovi (late 4th c. BC)](image1)

Bronze issue of the Thracian ruler Seuthes III from Bratya Daskalovi (late 4th c. BC)

![Bronze issue of the Macedonian ruler Lysimachus from Bratya Daskalovi (early 3rd c. BC)](image2)

Bronze issue of the Macedonian ruler Lysimachus from Bratya Daskalovi (early 3rd c. BC)
2. Celtic Coinage:

Celtic Drachms and Tetradrachms from Bratya Daskalovi
3. Roman Coinage – Numismatic material from this area of Thrace also allows us to precisely date the transition from the Celto-Thracian period to the beginning of complete Roman political and economic control. For example, whereas hoards from the area such as those from Bratya Daskalovi, Kolyo-Marinovo and Medovo, dated circa 19 BC, contain both Celtic and Roman coinage, indicating the gradual addition of Roman coinage to the local coin pool, the Pravoslav hoard from the same area, which dates to 10 years later, (9/8 BC), contains only Roman coins, indicating de facto Roman political and economic control by this date.

The complete disappearance of Macedonian and Thracian royal coinage (indeed all Macedonian and ‘Thracian’ coinage) at the beginning of the 3rd c. BC is followed chronologically by a prolonged period lasting until the end of the 1st c. BC when the only coinage produced in the area is Celtic. This clear evidence, together with the corroborating numismatic and archaeological data outlined above, once again confirms that the arrival of the Celtic tribes at the beginning of the 3rd c. BC marked the de facto end of ‘Hellenistic Thrace’.

The results of the scientific research in Central Thrace presented above is a major step forward in Bulgarian archaeology. For the first time Celtic numismatic and archaeological material has been presented in a (relatively) objective manner, and the evidence discovered during these excavations clearly indicates, as has been pointed out by local archaeologists, that the pre-Roman population of today’s Bulgaria had a significant Celtic element (Tonkova et al 2011).