

BRONZE AGE GOLD TORQUES FROM BULGARIA

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Abstract: The paper presents 12 gold torques from Bulgaria dated to the last centuries of the 3rd – first half of the 2nd millennium BC. Two main groups – with flattened and rolled back ends (Group 1) considered to be chronologically later, and with rolled back and wrapped over the bar ends (Group 2) considered to be earlier, are distinguished. Based on parallels with similar torques from Central- and South-eastern Europe, Anatolia and the Near East as well as with other precious metals finds from the Eastern Balkans some questions related to the existing and the nature of the contacts between the latter and the Aegean during that Early – Middle Bronze Age periods are discussed.

Cuvinte-cheie: bronz timpuriu și mijlociu, colane de aur, Europa centrală și de sud-est, Anatolia și Orientul Apropiat

Rezumat: Articolul de față discută 12 colane de aur descoperite în Bulgaria datând din ultimele secole ale mileniului III și prima jumătate a mileniului II î.Chr. Se disting două mari grupuri de astfel de piese: Grupul 1, format din colane având capetele aplatizate și rulate, datate cronologic mai târziu și Grupul 2, alcătuit din exemplare cu capete întoarse și înfășurate în jurul barei, considerat mai timpuriu. Pe baza unor paralele cu colane similare din Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est, Anatolia și Orientul Apropiat, precum și cu alte descoperiri din metale prețioase din zona de est a Balcanilor, se ridică anumite întrebări legate de existența și natura contactelor dintre aceasta și zona egeeană, pe durata perioadelor timpurie și mijlocie ale epocii bronzului.

Metal torques are one of the most characteristic features of the European Bronze Age; their number in certain regions, such as Central Europe reaches tens of thousands. While the majority of the torques (made of bronze), especially those dated to the later Bronze Age sequence, have been argued to be "...means of exchange with a standardized weight, prämonetäre Zahlungsmittel"¹, at least a fair part of the earlier ones was used as neck-rings as shown by the excavations of numerous Early Bronze Age necropolises. The vast majority of the torques from the latter group was made of bronze/copper, while those made of precious metals were quite few. Conversely, the number of Bronze Age torques in Bulgaria made of gold bars is significant. Unfortunately, all of them are stray finds thus narrowing down the possibilities for exploring the fact itself. However, a closer look at their characteristics, chronological position and analogies could help a better understanding of the cultural contacts, trade routes and exchange during the Bronze Age in Europe and Near East.

MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TORQUES

Currently, twelve Bronze Age torques made of plain or twisted gold bars are known from Bulgaria (Fig. 1; 17/1–6). Generally, two main groups could be distinguished: **Group 1** where the ends of the torques were flattened and rolled back forming "ears"/loops; and **Group 2** where the ends of the torques were rolled back and wrapped over the bar.

Seven torques fall into the first group, and five into the second one as follows:

Group 1.

Svishtov Hoard. Stray find, a few kilometres west of the city. The hoard consists of 13 gold objects – six torques with loops, six hair-rings and a bracelet; and six bronze objects – three complete double-axes and one fragmented double-axe, a fragmented shaft-hole axe and a fragment of a chisel/mattock. The objects were placed into a clay, handmade amphora-like vessel (Fig. 4)². The torques were made by casting and additional hammering. Three of them (nos. 1–3) were made of plain bars, the other three (Nos. 4–6) – of twisted ones, all of them made into a circular shape. Dimensions: **No. 1.** Gold torque with loops; made of a plain bar (HM-Svishtov, inv. No. I-2080). Diameter – 12.1 cm; thickness of the bar: 0.44 cm at the upper part, 0.14 cm at the loops; weight – 42.7 g (Fig. 2/6; 5); **No. 2.** Gold torque with loops; made of a plain bar (HM-Svishtov, inv. No. I-2081). Diameter – 10.1 cm; thickness of the bar: 0.45 cm at the upper part, 0.16 cm at the loops; weight – 37.4 g (Fig. 2/4; 6); **No. 3.** Gold torque with loops; made of a plain bar (HM-Svishtov, inv. No. I-2082). Diameter – 9.9 cm; thickness of the bar: 0.44 cm at the upper part, 0.18 cm at the loops; weight – 29.7 g (Fig. 2/2; 7); **No. 4.** Gold torque with loops; made of a twisted bar (HM-Svishtov, inv. No. I-2077). Diameter – 9.2 cm; thickness of the bar: 0.33 cm at the upper part, 0.14 cm at the loops; weight – 27.5 g (Fig. 2/3; 8); **No. 5.** Gold torque with loops; made of a twisted bar (HM-Svishtov, inv. No. I-2078).

¹ See Vandkilde 2005 and the discussion there.

² Alexandrov *et alii* 2018b.