



IDEOLOGY OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE ENEOLITHIC/BRONZE AGE PARIETAL ART IN THE MAGURA CAVE, NORTH-WEST BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

In my presentation I put the accent on liminality of the physical and cultural geography that establishes conditions for appearance of transitive social characteristics in the late Eneolithic/Bronze Age societies in the Balkans. The present approach focuses on exploration of particular representations made inside the Magura cave as active social agents. They facilitated the production of the self and the reproduction of society in a direction of developing aspirations of certain groups of people for exerting greater control over technologies of high-temperatures (production of ceramics and metals), increasing functionality of pottery and tools and knowledge about natural powers of the world.

RIASSUNTO

Nella mia comunicazione metterò l'accento sulla liminalità della geografia fisica e culturale che stabilisce le condizioni per l'apparire di caratteristiche sociali transitive nelle società balcaniche del tardo Eneolitico e dell'Età del Bronzo. Tale approccio si focalizza sull'esplorazione di particolari rappresentazioni realizzate all'interno della grotta di Magura come attivi agenti sociali. Esse facilitavano la produzione dell'io e la riproduzione della società in direzione dello sviluppo delle aspirazioni di alcuni gruppi esercitanti un maggiore controllo su tecniche ad alte temperature (produzione di ceramica e metalli), aumentando la funzionalità delle ceramiche e degli utensili e la conoscenza sulle forze naturali del mondo.

RESUME

Dans ma communication, je mettrai un accent particulier sur la liminalité de la géographie physique et culturelle qui établit les conditions pour l'apparition de caractéristiques sociales transitives dans les sociétés balkaniques du Néolithique tardif et de l'Age du Bronze. Telle approche se focalise sur l'exploration de particulières représentations réalisées dans la grotte de Magura en tant que actifs agents sociaux. Elles facilitaient la production du soi et la reproduction de la société vers le développement des aspirations de certains groupes qui exerçaient un control majeur sur des techniques à hautes températures (production de céramique et métaux), en augmentant la fonctionnalité de la céramique et des outils et la connaissance sur les forces naturelles du monde.

INTRODUCTION

The formation of society in Eneolithic/Bronze Age Balkans has been considered so far as a process that helped appropriation of both economic and political power. This general line of interpretation reveals that social mechanisms such as the access to exotic objects and control over exchange patterns have to be of major importance for building up successful strategies of leadership and aristocratic domination. This understanding of the development of Eneolithic/Bronze Age communities is based to a considerable extent on burial evidence (Varna, Durankulak, Orsoja necropolises). The social status appears to have been expressed and maintained through the acquisition, display, and consumption of special objects made of exotic materials in both life and death. This indicates not only increasing social differentiation but also the emergence of an ideology of the individual (Shennan 1982). Thus the emergence of competitive individualism takes the leading role in explanations for the development of parietal and mobiliary art. This hypothesis stems from and further develops previous interpretations of the appearance of human art and claims validity under one form or another for all the pre- and proto-historical periods. For example, it is widely accepted that

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important social practices defined the development of art as symbolic extension of hunting (Reihach 1903). Although this concerns Palaeolithic art, the researchers occupied with later periods replace 'hunting magic' with 'exchange' of prestige goods. The mechanic change of an interpretative concept with a similar one made possible the process of development of art to be solely explained in the wake of emerging competitive individualism in the Bronze Age Europe (Kristiansen 1987). This problematic understanding of art as a formal representation of chief's aspirations for greater power and prestige helps to explain the interpretative inconsistencies of some authors. For example, even for the Neolithic burials in the Durankulak necropolis (North-eastern Bulgaria) 'prestige goods' are interpreted differentially when they accompany male and female burials. A rich grave of a man is automatically considered as belonging to a high-status person. In contrast, a woman buried in a rich grave is, at most, considered as a priest (Todorova, Vajsov 1993: 228). The same authors made an attempt for creating a seriation sequence of the system of signs found throughout the Balkans. They hoped to find out chronological and geographic groupings. Neither of these expected structures is visible from the scheme (Ibidem 232, Fig. 228). This example only shows that symbolic representations appear in a hazardous way in archaeological record. Comparisons help developing broad chronological schemes but through them it is not possible to achieve accurate classification of artefacts and representations. My intention is to turn this chaotic body of data into a meaningful explanation of the development of parietal art in the Magura cave in terms of the wider social geography of Eneolithic/Bronze Age societies in the Balkans. The first objective is to take into consideration particular symbolic representations from the point of view of gender. This is a key concept for those communities both for the symbolic constitution of social actors and to other institutional structures such as kinship, production, and exchange. The power of this ideology encompasses privileged and subordinated groups and was often expressed in symbolic spaces properly developed and situated within the existing social geography. The second objective is to analyze the balance between sacred and living/productive environments. This is based on the preliminary observation that while in the Eneolithic, the cultural geography maintains a balance between sacred and living environments, in the Bronze Age a radical change appears in it that reveals an increasing domination of sacred space over the related to it productive and living environment. The final objective is to trace down the profound changes in the way of conceptualizing landscapes as establishing emotional and cognitive foundation of the possibility for public acceptance of the ideology of aristocratic rulers. On this analytical background I shall build the structure of my study in the following manner. First, I shall provide examples of the changing way of conceptualization of different kinds of natural and artificial landscapes that converge to similar social behaviour. The accent is put on perceptions that help to conceptualize landscapes as 'liminal' physical and human places. Second, I shall present various examples of symbolic space that show the tension between male and female ideologies. Finally, on this background, I shall discuss particular representations in the Magura cave that display in a meaningful way the changes in ideology of Eneolithic/Bronze Age societies in the Balkans.

CHANGING WAY OF CONCEPTUALIZING LANDSCAPES

I shall discuss in brief three different examples of early human habitation. The first is the Yunatsite tell situated in the Upper Thracian lowland, the second is the prehistoric habitation on the Beljakovets Karst plateau in North-central Bulgaria, and the third is the Magura cave and its surrounding landscapes (Fig. 1). The contrast between habitation in alluvial plains and Karst plateaus makes visible in a better way the evolution of the productive, living and sacred environment.

The Yunatsite tell is the longest Eneolithic/Bronze Age sequence in the Balkans. It lies on a wide water edge that divides the Upper Thracian plain into northern and southern parts. The tell itself marks the border between the flooded and non-flooded plains featured by the large Maritsa river and its tributary - the Topolnitsa river. The advantage of this location seems to be the possibility for equal exploitation of the flooded terrain suitable for intensive alluvial cultivation of crops and vegetables and the non-flooded plain to the north appropriate for intensive crop cultivation on the easy for working leached maroon soils (Kanchev 2006, 57). Traces of "satellite" settlements were found within this productive environment. Thus the settlement pattern and its geographical milieu outline two intensive cycles of crop cultivation and wild vegetation growth that are both competitive and complementary to one another. The settlement pattern also displays dynamic characteristics that underline the transfer of people, materials and labour between the "satellite" and the main settlements and between them and other, distant communities.

The above presented dynamics of the geography and human settlement patterns can be further divided into two different zones of seasonality. The first one is the alluvial plain. The major event in it is the series of spring floods that feed up the vast basin of the Maritsa river and its adjacent areas with water. The consequences of these floods are year-round since the water and the fertile mud help creating and maintaining different habitats of plants, fish, birds that are suitable food for the wild and domestic animals. Even in winters some of these habitats are active and help surviving animals by offering them small mammals, fish, roots, moss, dried and fermented fruits and seeds. This zone had a major influence on human habitation in the area by offering a year-round seasonal cycle that starts and ends up with the spring floods.

The second zone of seasonality consists of diverse animal and plant habitats stretching along the course of the Topolnitsa river. This includes the northern plain of the Upper Thracian valley and the mountainous area of the western Sredna Gora mountains. They include four-seasonal cycles of habitation, growth and maintenance of animal and plant populations. Although the inhabitants of the Yunatsite tell did not engage directly with these environments, the interaction of the two zones defines the entire cycle of the habitation of this aggregated community.

The Beljakovets Karst plateau and its adjacent areas constitute the second region that exemplifies the liminality of the integration of the pronounced natural features in the terrain with early human habitation. The region encompasses two main geological features: the Pre-Balkan Mountains and the Mizian Lovec-Tarnovo anticline (Bonchev 1971), which exposes Lower Cretaceous limestone strata. The predominantly Urgonian layers contain deposits of flint concretions of good quality that can be found in secondary deposits in the Mizian plain. The physical and geographical settings display greater diversity than other regions in Bulgaria do. Although relatively small, the region has pronounced local irregularity of the annual amount of rainfall, fertility, water supply and distribution of flint outcrops.

The prehistoric settlements from the Neolithic to Bronze and Iron Ages are concentrated on Karst areas, alluvial plains and the low hills of the Pre-Balkan heights (covered with loess and grey forest soils). There is a great deal of variety of prehistoric settlements and the modes in which they occupy different landscape forms. Their basic characteristics consist of variation in size, diversity of settlement types, different means of settlement evolution and the variety of the landscape forms they occupy. For example, there are small to medium prehistoric tell settlements situated along the alluvial plains. These include the biggest tell known north of the Balkan range: Samovodene. The caves were continuously occupied from Palaeolithic up to the Bronze Age. Other than the well known Eneolithic necropolises, Varna and Durankulak on the Black Sea coast, two other Eneolithic treasures with golden artefacts were discovered in the Emenska cave and the Hotnitsa tell (Stanev 1991). The predominant settlement type is surface single period. All types of settlement reveal a unique internal dynamic of development, which makes them different from the known pattern from Anatolia and Thrace. They feature an overlapping occupation of the successive building horizons that enlarges their surfaces over time. On tells, this type of evolution seems to be governed by the appearance of negative forms such as ritual shafts in the central areas and "pit-dwellings" (dugout structures) on their periphery.

Although there is clear, pronounced regional irregularity of the distribution of resources, it is not the physical geography, but instead human culture that lies behind the establishment of this settlement pattern and imbues the prehistoric occupation of the Karst area with visible, transient characteristics in the terrain. Certain aspects of the ideology of these early communities can be associated with the important artificial landforms. The study of the type of settlement and their architecture reveals the marked opposition between the rectangular, agglutinative housing on tells and the spacious, dispersed, short-term activity areas of dugout structures. The opposition between the positive (such as tells and houses) and negative forms (such as pits, shafts and dugout structures) probably puts an end to the artificial and natural landscapes as sources of inspiration for ancestry-based common metaphors of communication. From that instant on, the recurrent appearance of dugouts reveals the profound change in the community value system. If in the previous periods (Neolithic/early Eneolithic) artefacts vested with symbolic violence did not or scarcely appeared, exotic artefacts associated with warfare, hunting, personal wealth and prestige started to increasingly appear from late Eneolithic onwards. Some of the rituals became externalized from their domestic context and performed in caves. Conceived as liminal areas, caves turned out to be appropriate places for making claims of the increased public demands of some lineages. 'Exotic' artefacts such as golden ornaments, points, long blades were deliberately deposited. It is not surprising that one of the earliest golden finds (two golden earrings) appears in the Emenska cave which is situated in one of the most beautiful canyons in the region.



The third example involves the Magura cave which is situated to the north of the western Prebalkans, near the Rabisha village, Vidin district. This is a Karst region from the Upper Jurassic period. Conglomerate formations above form the Belogradchik anticline (Tsanova 2003). Its North-western part is famous with the weathered rock figures that crown the highest parts of the region. The access to the top part of the region is steep, difficult to walk and the meanders of the river valleys propose selective view to the stone figures and the surrounding landscape. The region has not been submitted to exhaustive archaeological studies. From the middle of the 1990-es Bulgarian-French Palaeolithic excavations are systematically conducted in the Kozarnika cave and in few other caves in the region. In front of the Kozarnika cave a Bronze Age burial has been found. On the other side of the valley of the Skomlia river, in the Mirizlivka cave, a bone needle with an anthropomorphic head was found during excavations in the 1930-es (Todorova and Vajsov 1993, fig. 224, p. 228). Some test trenches were made inside the Magura cave that revealed habitation structures from the Bronze and Iron Ages close to the galleries with bat guano paintings.

A comparison of the pronounced relief of the region with the long galleries of the Magura cave suggest that both have potential to structure ritual experience. The branching valleys of the outer world flanked with caves from where one can hear different echo and sounds combined with the changing, selective view on the surrounding landforms (stone figures) that stand above the tick layers of reddish and white limestone reinforce burial context. The Bronze Age burial in front of the Kozarnika cave suggest the importance of this place as a boundary between the two worlds. Quite similar are the experiences in the Magura cave. Its inner structure looks like a labyrinth that is featured by the immediacy and change in sounds and light. These qualities of the inner and outer realms probably created mediating places in a layered world. They allowed humans to re-create access to the domain of ancestors through dramatic rituals.

Probably, this complex pattern of integrating the cosmological system into the competitive seasonal patterns of intensive crop cultivation stimulated the evolution of the symbology of everyday productive activities. The most visible are changes in pottery production. The old Neolithic/early Eneolithic coloured decoration disappeared. The key element in this change is the greater accent put on the better transformation through reaching higher temperatures of clay into ceramics, better functionality of vessels (wider mouths and pronounced handles) and replacement of any coloured decoration with barb ornamentation and darkened outer face. This example shows that male symbolism of transformation of materials and of every-day and ritual functionality of vessels overwhelmed the previous pottery design and decoration that accentuated more female views and values of fertility and transformation (through cooking) of primary substances in and around the oven in the house.

Flint-knapping techniques also changed visibly. In these periods two different categories of artefacts that bear particular conceptualization of masculinity and functionality appeared: arrow-heads and tools with macro-traces of utilization. Arrow-heads display dynamic evolution: became smaller in size but their morphology suggests better functionality in terms of balanced weight and long-distance range of flight. These facts themselves signify heightened symbolic of male aspiration for military power. The second category of artefacts - flint tools with macro-traces of utilization - reveal an increased functionality that structures the activities of the separate houses. This tool functionality overpowers the morphology of the lithic artefacts established long ago by Upper Palaeolithic communities. Such an assumption is backed by the fact that the functional categories: gloss and smoothed edges that define most of the tools with macro-traces of utilization appear indiscriminately on typologically defined tools: end-scrapers, burins, truncations, backed pieces, blades and flakes. Formally, the old tradition of production of artefacts continues but their functionality and significance changed in a direction of subduing traditional communal activities oriented to transforming raw materials into product categories: foods, clothing, construction materials and so forth that in the Bronze Age were executed mostly inside houses. This is exactly opposite to the same practices that were executed in publicly accessible open spaces (between the houses) during the entire Neolithic and most of the time in the Eneolithic period.

This tension between male and female ideologies becomes also visible in the production of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines. The overall social significance of these figurines seems to be more personal and functionally related to clothing rather than to the category - 'objects of cult'. The latter is typical for the Neolithic when clay anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines were placed in a particular part of the house and in most cases took part in home-based ritual practices. The final Eneolithic and early Bronze Age representations have different social significance. The

figurines were made of new materials - metals and bone. These materials and especially metals reveal in a similar manner as in the case of pottery production the male mastery and control over high temperatures that transform nature. Bone also expresses male potency of animal breeding, hunting, ploughing and warfare. This ideology is also visible on what figurines represent. There are examples of representation of oxen (bulls) made of gold and offered as grave good. This tendency is more visible during the Bronze Age where sexually neutral figurines (the representations do not allow to discern their sex) are presented in a position of adoration of Gods. Also, some figurative compositions and decoration on cult tables from the Eneolithic and Bronze Age are thought to represent calendars (Dermendzhev 2006). This accumulation of knowledge seems to be complemented by the early geographic notion of Europe, North Africa and the Near East. Recent investigations showed that Eneolithic axeheads made of jadeite have a single origin located at the Italian Alps in Liguria that spread over entire Europe (Errera et al. 2006).

All the artefact categories presented above fall into the category of 'prestige goods'. Their evolution, however, may be defined by the constant negotiation and re-negotiation of male and female ideologies. A slightly different perspective on them can show that all these 'elements' of culture change represent an accumulation of knowledge that increasingly establish control over society. The knowledge of high temperatures, the technical and symbolic applications of various rocks and metals, the geographical knowledge of distant places accumulate 'symbolic capital' that may have acted through the established gender systems. Consequently, this process may have formed regional and supra-regional ideological systems which may have been similar to the historically well-known circum-Mediterranean complex of 'honour' societies (Bourdieu 1977).

THE MAGURA PAINTINGS

The Magura cave is a relatively big and dry cave with inner space of 28 600 m². The main corridor has two entrances and three branching galleries. In the second one, at a distance of 375 m from the main entrance, there are numerous paintings on the walls (Fig. 2). They are made from bat guano and few - from light-brown ochre. Both types of materials can be found in great quantities inside the cave. The paintings have been studied and commented by a number of authors. Most of them have similar opinions about the chronology of the majority of the paintings - final Eneolithic/Bronze and Iron Ages (Mikov 1928, 1955; Djambazov 1958; Anati 1971; Nougier 1977). More precisely M. Gimbutas relates the images of axes and the composition of the anthropomorphic sun to the Eneolithic period (1989). W. Gerasimova-Tomova and T. Stojtshev ascribe some female anthropomorphic images to the Eneolithic on the basis of their resemblance to the stratified evidence of anthropomorphic mobiliary art made on ceramic and marble (1994).

The interpretations of the paintings has never been considered as a priority or as a necessity for beginning of a debate among specialists about their wider social significance. As a starting point for my discussion I will use the conceptual tools of visitor's embodied experience coming from the cave as a whole, from the branching galleries in it and the surrounding landscape immediately outside it. These 'natural' formations define human ritual experience of entrance and emergence of dramatic moments. The scenery implies both initiation and conclusion of operations upon reality. The general meanings of anthropomorphic sun and the human images in a position of adoration suggest that they may have marked the culmination moment of a cosmogonic drama: the creation of the inhabitable world. The separate images of these compositions underline the symbols of social change observed in other archaeological sites and places. They reflect the increasing knowledge about the movement of celestial bodies, the transformative power of high temperatures, the greater social efficiency in using rocks and metals, incorporation of new ecological niches (full-scale development of pastoralist communities). All these 'elements' of cultural change stimulate the success in establishing greater control over the new technologies and social achievements of particular kin-groups or lineages. The process of cultural shift changes the 'history' of the long-term living places such as Yunatsite and Beljakovets. In Yunatsite this process is made visible through the 'major historic' events that happened at the site. It starts with the great number of ritually killed people whose skeletons were found in the final Eneolithic horizon. This event is followed by the rapid turning of the central place of the mound into an open public place, while life continued on the periphery of the tell. The final event was the practical division of the tell associated with XIII building horizon. At approximately that time a large ditch was made. The invested in its construction communal time and effort cannot be explained with rational reasons. Its appearance seems nothing else but a symbolic mark



that has the potential to mobilize community's efforts for conducting great amount of physical work and to divide the members of the community into two different in their social status parts. Similar effects may have had the opposition between rectangular, agglutinative housing and the ritual shaft and dugout structures in the tell Samovodene situated near the Beljakovets plateau. These considerations help to explain the appearance of a number of golden adornments in the tell Hotnitsa and the two golden earrings in the Emenska cave that both are situated on the periphery of the Beljakovets plateau. The positive and the negative forms such as tells, caves, pits, ritual shafts became stable points of reference that objectify claims for control over knowledge and social differentiation of particular rituals. Taken together, these facts show the increasing aspirations for imposing control over the exchange of artefacts, materials, technologies, access to resources and ceremonies.

All these signs are visible in the paintings of the Magura cave. The representation of symbolic axes or hoes (or both) reinforces the male aspirations for control over life and death (Fig. 3). The functionality of these artefacts made of hard rocks or antler is associated with working soils (most effective in alluvial plains such as that near Yunatsite) and with woodwork and warfare. Although working soils with a hoe is a female activity, this ambiguity of male and female division of labour masks the heightened male potency through which certain lineages or kin-groups appropriate rights for exerting control over public activities and subsistence practices.

The second type of images represented in the Magura cave and that have exact parallels in the outer world are the "female" figurines shaped in a position of adoration. Such flat figurines are known from a number of late Eneolithic/early Bronze Age settlements: Yunatsite, Ezero, the tell of Balbunar, Razgrad district, Varna necropolis. Both the images in the cave and the actual figurines found in archaeological sites show a heightened ritual performance and experience of adoration to the major cosmogonic drama - creation of the inhabitable world by Gods. Seen from this point of view, these figurines throw some insight on the overall functioning of these early communities. If we take into consideration that these societies consisted of small-scale communities - perhaps 200 - 500 members, than, in each of them, there must have been established a group of believers that regularly visited 'special' places like that of the Magura cave. The wide-spread distribution of these figurines suggests that some people periodically participated into particular rites that strengthened the overall community's commitment to 'outstanding' places that were ritually significant for the communities living in a given region. Thus these representations may have turned into symbols of community's identity that heightened the claims over exploitation of particular resources and became a source of inspiration for transformation of knowledge and power.

The frieze of the anthropomorphic suns accompanied by human faces and figures of adoration is the third image that correspond to mobiliary art in the outer world. The most famous one is the cult scene from Ovcharovo. In general, these representations show both home-based ritual practices and rituals performed in isolated, difficult to walk places such as caves and rock-shelters. On the other hand they show the evolution of the ritual system. At the core of both types of representation stayed ideas of linking with ancestors, local origins of myths, and the existence of hidden, invisible world. All these cultural 'elements' were replicated and elaborated so that they became the focus of a major ritual system. The evolution of this system is visible in the Magura cave. Its critical achievement that has the major impact upon development of social inequality may have been the link established between two symbolic axes. The first one is vertical and it opposes the above ground and the below ground worlds. The second is horizontal, concentric one that makes contrast between the spiritual center of a given community and the surrounding foreign lands. A third, less discernible axe, is the accent put with equal importance on domestic and 'special' contexts where the knowledge about time, movement of celestial bodies and change of seasons was transmitted from generation to generation.

CONCLUSIONS

The present paper focuses on some of the Magura paintings not as an isolated, exclusive achievement of early artistic behaviour but as relationally established symbols in the late Eneolithic/Bronze Age cosmological system. It explores in terms of human agency the place of these images within a wider cultural geography. The aim is to study the evolution of the relationship between particular symbols and the physical space. There were considered three different places: Yunatsite region, Beljakovets Karst Plateau and the Magura region. At a first sight these regions seem to be extremely different from one another. A closer look, however, shows that they all are liminal places situated on the boundaries between various natural and productive environments of major importance for

building successful subsistence strategies of early farming communities. They all have the potential for creating a natural metaphor of boundedness and separation and as such underpin the process of increasing social differentiation. On the other hand each of these places and especially the one of the Magura cave display unique local ritual systems. Their unique features, however, may have arisen from the recombination and elaboration of cultural elements common to a broader region that encompasses eastern Balkans. Thus the home-based ritual practices gradually evolved and became externalized outside the living environment into isolated, secluded places where they were successfully transformed into ritual claims of particular kin-groups or lineages for exerting greater control over society. This process goes hand in hand with an increased interregional pattern of exchange of 'exotic' artefacts combined with the strengthening of local identities.

The interrelation of all these 'elements' of culture change had far reaching consequences. While gender ideologies stayed at the center of the process of increasing social inequality, the present analysis provides another category of social actors - that of particular kin-groups or lineages that aspired for assuming local and regional social control. This explains the gradual transformation of the living space into a sacred environment. It should be noted that transformation like that does not concern only the open-air settlements such as Yunatsite but also rock-shelters, canyons and caves. It was made clear that the known living and productive environment in areas featured by natural and artificial liminality started to play, in parallel with their older social functions, the role of inter-communal centers of ritual performance.

The question that arises from these considerations is about the quality of the process of culture change. It is often explained by dramatic "historic" events. The scenario involves invasion of "steppe" people from the plains in the Eastern Europe that destroyed the so far flourishing Eneolithic cultures in Southeastern Europe. This way all the events associated with the process of culture change are being presented as disruption caused by an external to the normal life of these communities factor (draughts of steppes, increased population pressure, etc.). They are presented either as an exceptional achievement (paintings in the Magura cave, for example) or as destruction of the Eneolithic culture in Yunatsite and elsewhere. The above analysis, however, shows rather different picture. It is a long process of gradual evolution of cosmogonic and mythical concepts and re-adjustment of local identities that cannot be reduced to a single linear process of social evolution. The totalizing effects of any rational argumentation such as models of culture change based on prestige-competition, on various structuralist patterns of evolution and economic development cannot constitute a solid explanatory ground for the emergence of the unique 'elements' of culture change. The only possible approach to this problematic seems to be to work on the widest array of data from within and develop it. The process of study itself organizes the data, discovers elements and distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not. The paintings in the Magura cave and the other artefacts related to them in other settlements and places should no longer serve as simple mnemonic devices that remind us about "historic" events that happened in an "exotic" past. This is the natural way of thought that seems understandable by the modern audience. It is not by chance the fact that tourist guides in the Magura cave start by telling fantastic stories about the natural features in the cave that are tightly related to the Bulgarian folklore. Thus, after setting the scene, the guides pass on telling about the magic rituals that happened inside the cave and the paintings that testify about them. A visitor has the chance to immerse into the place and observe paintings with understanding eyes. This is quite opposite to the rather boring practice of guided tours in museums and art galleries situated in large urban areas.

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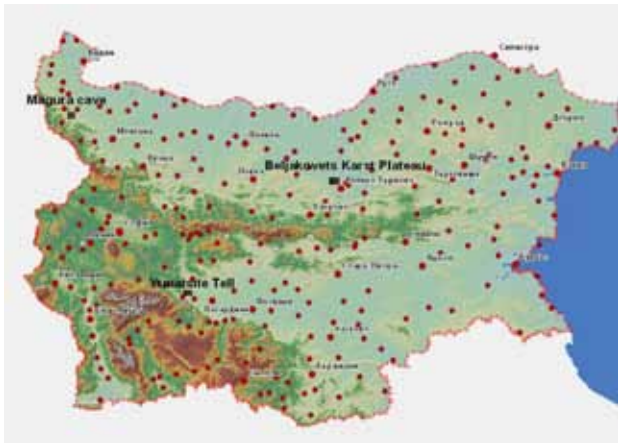


Fig. 1. Map of Bulgaria with the three micro-regions considered in the presentation.



Fig. 2. The plan of the Magura cave.



Fig. 3. Frieze with the anthropomorphic sun, axes/hoes and human figures.