

## RECENZII ȘI NOTE BIBLIOGRAFICE

**Bianca Preda-Bălănică, *Bronze Age Kurgans in Southern Romania, The Yamnaya Impact on Prehistoric Europe 6*, Archaeolingua, Budapest, 2024, 302 p. (48 in-text figures), 109 plates.**

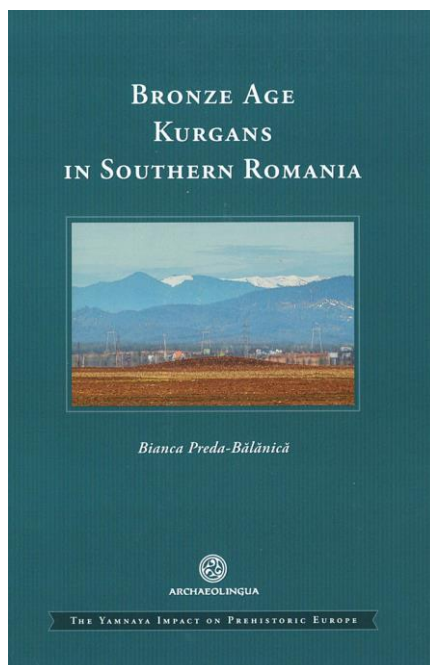
Dr. Preda-Bălănică's research provides a comprehensive synthesis of Bronze Age kurgan burials in Southern Romania. This study addresses a topic directly related to the author's research field and is grounded in her doctoral thesis.

*Bronze Age Kurgans in Southern Romania* addresses, among others, the Yamnaya phenomenon and "pre-Yamnaya" burial mounds. It opens with a *Foreword* written by Prof. Volker Heyd from the University of Helsinki and Dr. Cristian Schuster from the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology, and a *Preface* written by the author.

The main body of work is organized in six chapters. In *Introduction* (p. 11-24), the author explains the motivation behind this endeavor and the objectives pursued, what sources were used and methodologies applied, and, lastly, discusses definitions and terminologies used in this book. It draws on scholarly articles, specialized publications, and archival documents. Moreover, new archaeological excavations were examined through interdisciplinary methods, including archaeogenetics, metallography, and radiocarbon dating. This methodology was also applied to the reassessment of materials recovered from earlier archeological excavations.

In the second chapter, *Geographic setting* (p. 25-28), she makes a geographic analysis of the region considered – southern Romania with a focus on the Getic Piedmont and the Romanian plain; and how the terrain, climate, hydrography, etc., influences human contacts.

In the third chapter, *Kurgans and their research in Southern Romania* (p. 29-42), research history, research methodologies used in the past, and the topography of the kurgans discovered are analyzed. As a result, the author identified 83 burial mounds



with a total of 330 graves uncovered, only 39% of which providing comprehensive information. Another problem addressed in this book is the fact that many grave goods were lost or inadequately documented. In the subsection Kurgan Construction: Location in the Landscape, Surface Preparation, Shape the author underlines the importance of analyzing the placement of the kurgans. Positioned within vast plains, the mounds dominate the landscape, serving as visible landmarks for the community. The study also notes that such connections between the burial mounds and their environment have been largely overlooked in the existing literature.

The fourth chapter, *Burial rituals in Bronze Age Kurgans in Southern Romania* (p. 43-100), is the most substantial. It starts with discussions on chronological terminology, presenting a concise overview of the various chronological systems in use, and adopting the framework proposed by A. Vulpe and R. Băjenaru. The following subchapter presents an overview of the current academic understanding of Bronze Age Kurgans in the territories of Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary. It takes us through various burial ritual phases: pre-Yamnaya, Yamnaya, Katakombnaya, Mnogovalikovaya, and Sabatinovka-Noua-Coslogeni; thus, covering the whole Bronze Age. By carefully analyzing the graves researched in Southern Romania, the author classifies them into the burial phases mentioned above: 33 graves in the pre-Yamnaya phase, 141 graves in the Yamnaya phase, 9 graves in the Katakombnaya phase, 43 graves in the Mnogovalikovaya phase, and 7 graves in the Sabatinovka-Noua-Coslogeni phase. The rest of the chapter is divided into subchapters dedicated to each of these phases. All of them follow a similar structure. Firstly, a short discussion regarding the attribution of graves and the criteria the author used for the attributions in the volume are presented. This is followed by analyses of landscape, kurgan use, stratigraphy, the preparation of the funerary structure, disposal of the dead, bioanthropological and genetic data, ochre, faunal remains, and grave goods.

In the fifth chapter, *The Absolute Chronology of the Bronze Age Kurgans in Southern Romania* (p. 101-118), the author presents a detailed analysis of the absolute chronology of Bronze Age kurgans in Southern Romania. For radiocarbon dating, samples were taken from 15 individuals of which only 13 yielded results. Along with previous research, a total of 76 radiocarbon dates were analyzed. With all this data, a Bayesian modelling approach was used to construct the absolute chronology of the Bronze Age burials in Southern Romania. This method of analysis proved more effective for the Early Bronze Age phase, due to the larger number of samples. One of the important findings is that the starting boundary of the Yamnaya phase preceded the concluding boundary of the pre-Yamnaya period.

The sixth chapter, *Conclusions and future outlook* (p. 119-124), summarizes the main results of the study and offers some directions for future research. The author

concludes that, despite offering a more detailed study of the kurgans in southern Romania, several gaps remain unaddressed. Further research is particularly needed for the Middle and Late Bronze Age.

The conclusion is followed by an *Abstract, References*, and three appendices. The first provides archaeological information about the kurgans in Southern Romania, the second presents the bioanthropological analyses available, and the third presents the listing of radiocarbon analyses used. Lastly, the book ends with 109 plates.

Overall, this monograph succeeds in clarifying certain gaps regarding the chronological stages in the development and construction of Bronze Age Kurgans. Another important aspect is the analysis of the stages involved in the construction, use, and transformation of funerary structures during the Bronze Age. The careful documentation and systemic analysis of archaeological materials provide an invaluable reference for both current and future research.

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