

THE LADY IN THE OVEN – Mediolana and the Zaravetz Culture

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The most extraordinary ancient ‘burial’ to be discovered in recent years is that of a woman found in a pottery kiln near the Celtic settlement of Ablana (by the village of Krivina, Rousse region) on the Bulgarian Danube. This burial is remarkable for a number of reasons, foremost among them its situation – in a large pottery kiln – symbolic of the thriving barbarian culture which inhabited this region in the Late Iron Age, and also for the nature of the burial – archaeological testimony to the brutal fashion in which this culture was destroyed.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

MEDIOLANA

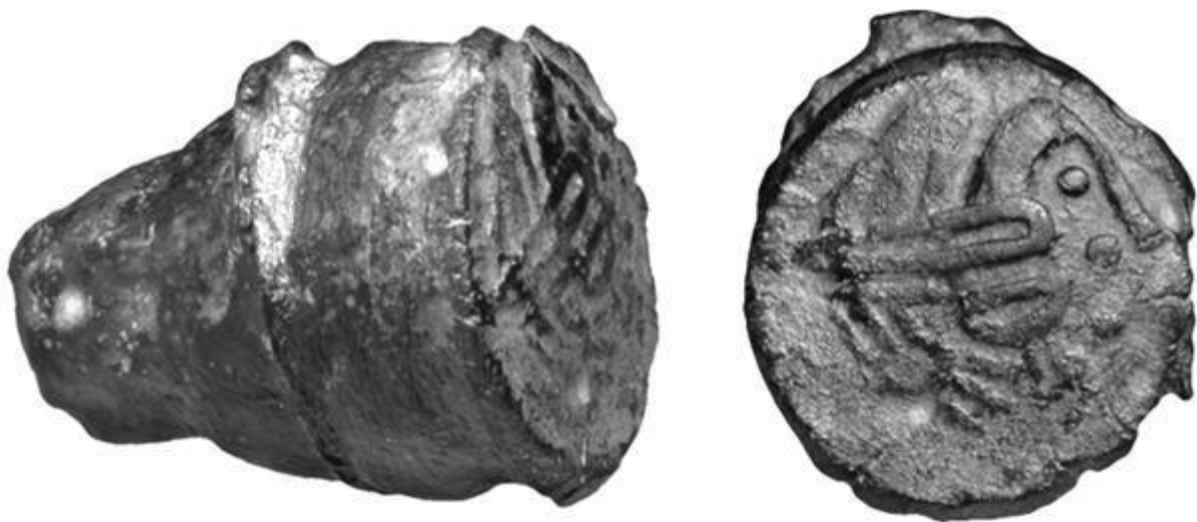
Recent discoveries of Celtic archaeological sites and material from the Rouse area (and northeastern Bulgaria in general) have confirmed previous linguistic and numismatic evidence that this area was one of the key Celtic economic and political centers in late Iron Age Thrace. From an economic perspective, the most significant Celtic center on this stretch of the Danube was situated at *Mediolana* (modern Pirgovo, Rouse region) (see ‘Celtic Settlements in n. Bulgaria’ article). *Mediolana* was strategically situated near the confluence of the Danube and the Lom river, the latter connecting *Mediolana* with Celtic settlements in the interior such as Abritu (Razgrad). A vast amount of Celtic archaeological and numismatic material has been discovered in the vicinity of Pirgovo/*Mediolana* over the past century, including separate hoards of Celtic coins found in 1910, 1938, 1979, and 2008 around the village (see Numismatics section, especially ‘Little Metal Men’ article, with relevant lit.), clearly indicating that *Mediolana*/Pirgovo was a key Celtic economic and coin production center in the pre-Roman period.



Celtic tetradrachms of the Sattelkopffferd type from Pirgovo/*Mediolana*, Russe Region (from the 1978 hoard)

Further hoards of Celtic coins discovered in the Rouse area include 4 hoards found in the area of Rouse city (Gerassimov 1966:213; Preda 1973:209, # 36; Draganov 2001:40; Gerassimov 1966:213; Preda 1973:209, # 35; Gerassimov 1979:138; Jurukova 1979:60; Prokopov 2006, # 260), as well as from the villages of Slivo Pole (Gerassimov 1969:234; Preda 1973:240, no. 47) and Nikolovo (Gerassimov 1952, 403-404; Preda 1973:240, # 44) (both beside the Celtic settlement of Tegrís), Belyanovo (Gerassimov 1963:257; Draganov 2001: 40) (beside the Celtic settlement of Ablana), Ostritsa (Gerassimov 1962:231; Draganov 2001:40) and Pepelina (Gerassimov 1966:213; Preda 1998:219) (both on the Lom river, slightly to the south of the Celtic settlement at Pirgovo/Mediolana), Mechka (Moushmov 1932:314) (beside Mediolana), and Pissanets (Shkorpil, 1914:49, fig. 46.2; Gerassimov, 1939:344).

The recent publication of a ‘mother matrix’ for the production of Celtic coinage of the ‘Sattelkopffferd’ type discovered in the Rouse region confirms large-scale Celtic coin production in this area.



The ‘Mother-Matrix’ for production of Celtic “Sattelkopffferd” tetradrachms from the Rouse area (late 2nd / early 1st c. BC)

(see ‘Mother Matrix’ article)

THE ZARAVETZ CULTURE

Further Celtic settlements on this short stretch of the Danube included *Ablana* (today's Gorno Ablanovo) to the west of *Mediolana*, and *Tegrís* (today's Marten) and *Appiaria* (placed XIV and IX Roman miles from Tegrís (respectively TP and IA), to the east of *Mediolana* (see 'Celtic Settlements in Northern Bulgaria' article). As with *Mediolana*, *Ablana* was situated at a vital strategic point – in this case near the confluence of the Jantra river with the Danube. Extensive Celtic archaeological and numismatic material discovered along the courses of both the Lom and Jantra rivers indicate that these were vital trade arteries connecting Celtic settlements on the Danube with those in the interior (see below).

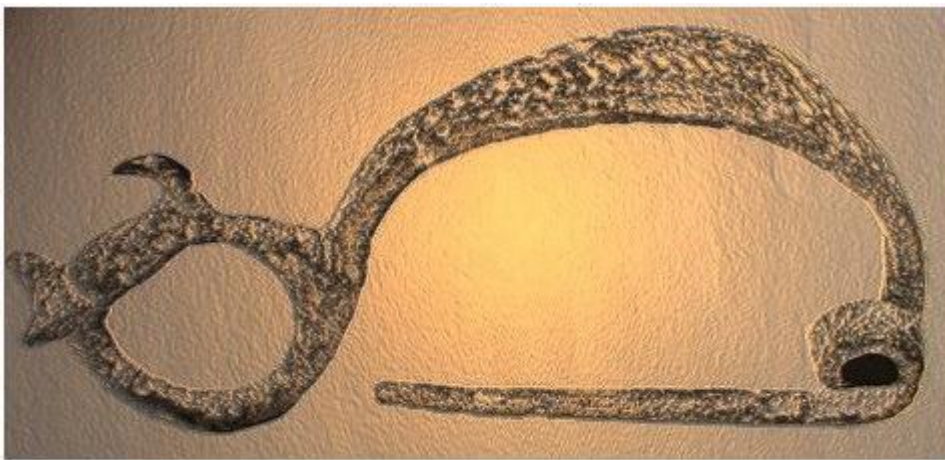
A high concentration of La Tène and Celtic numismatic material has been registered in northeastern Bulgaria, particularly in the aforementioned Rousse region on the Danube, and in the Veliko Tarnovo, Targovishte, Schumen, Razgrad and Western Varna regions (see Numismatics and Archaeology sections, especially 'New Material 1 – 2' articles).



Celtic Burial Artifacts from North-Eastern Bulgaria (Varna Archaeological Museum)

(see also 'Killing the Objects' article)

It should be noted that this concentration of La Tène and Celtic numismatic evidence also coincides exactly with the area of distribution of the Celtic Zaravetz lead and bronze coinage, indicating that whereas the area further to the east and northeast was dominated by the Peucini Bastarnae (see ‘Bastarnae’ and ‘Peucini’ articles), this area was settled by different Celtic groups. Concentrations of the Zaravetz type coinage, in combination with the other types of Celtic coinage and La Tène material, in the Veliko Tarnovo/western Schumen region, such as that discovered in the cultural layers at Zaravetz hillfort (Veliko Tarnovo) indicate that this area, connected to the Danube settlements by the Jantra river, was also a key Celtic political and economic center in the late Iron Age.



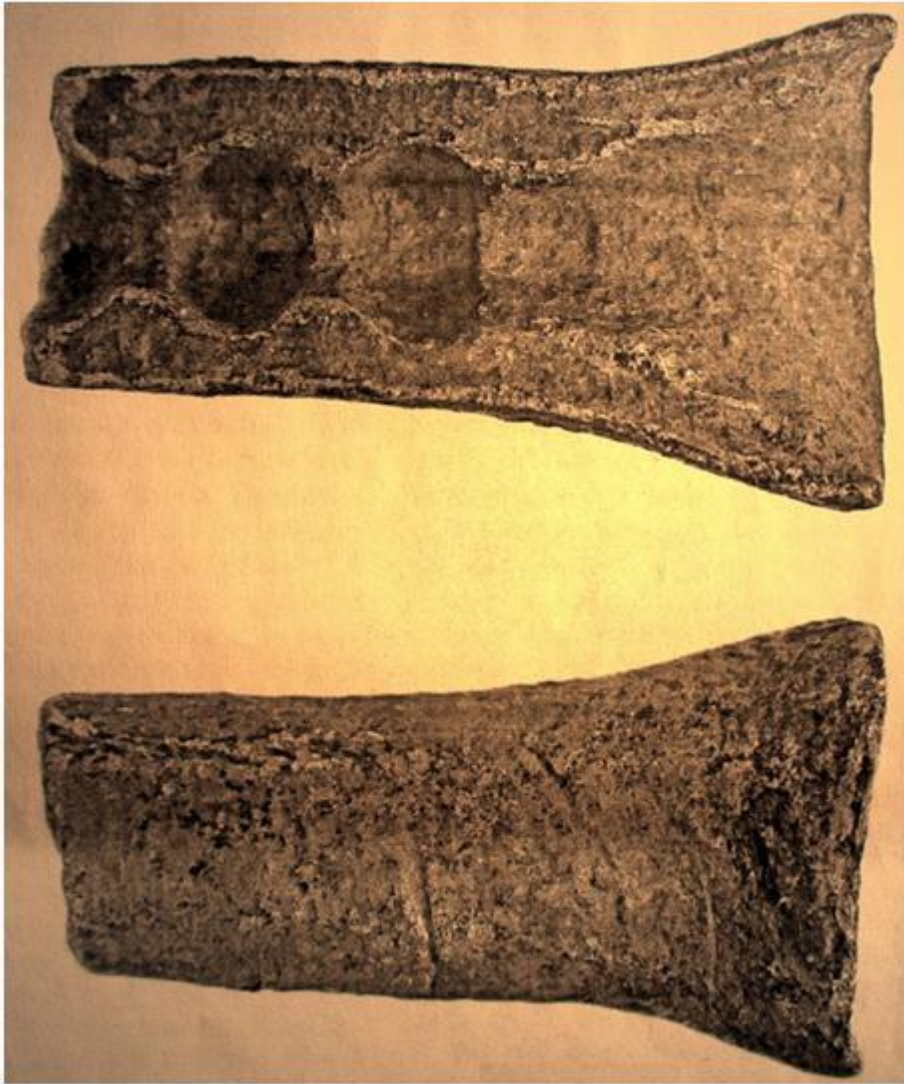
Bronze Celtic fibula with zoomorphic ring from Veliko Tarnovo (After Mircheva 2007)

(see ‘New Material 2’ article)



Celtic Zaravetz lead issue – Northeastern Bulgaria (2nd c. BC)

(see Numismatics section 8)

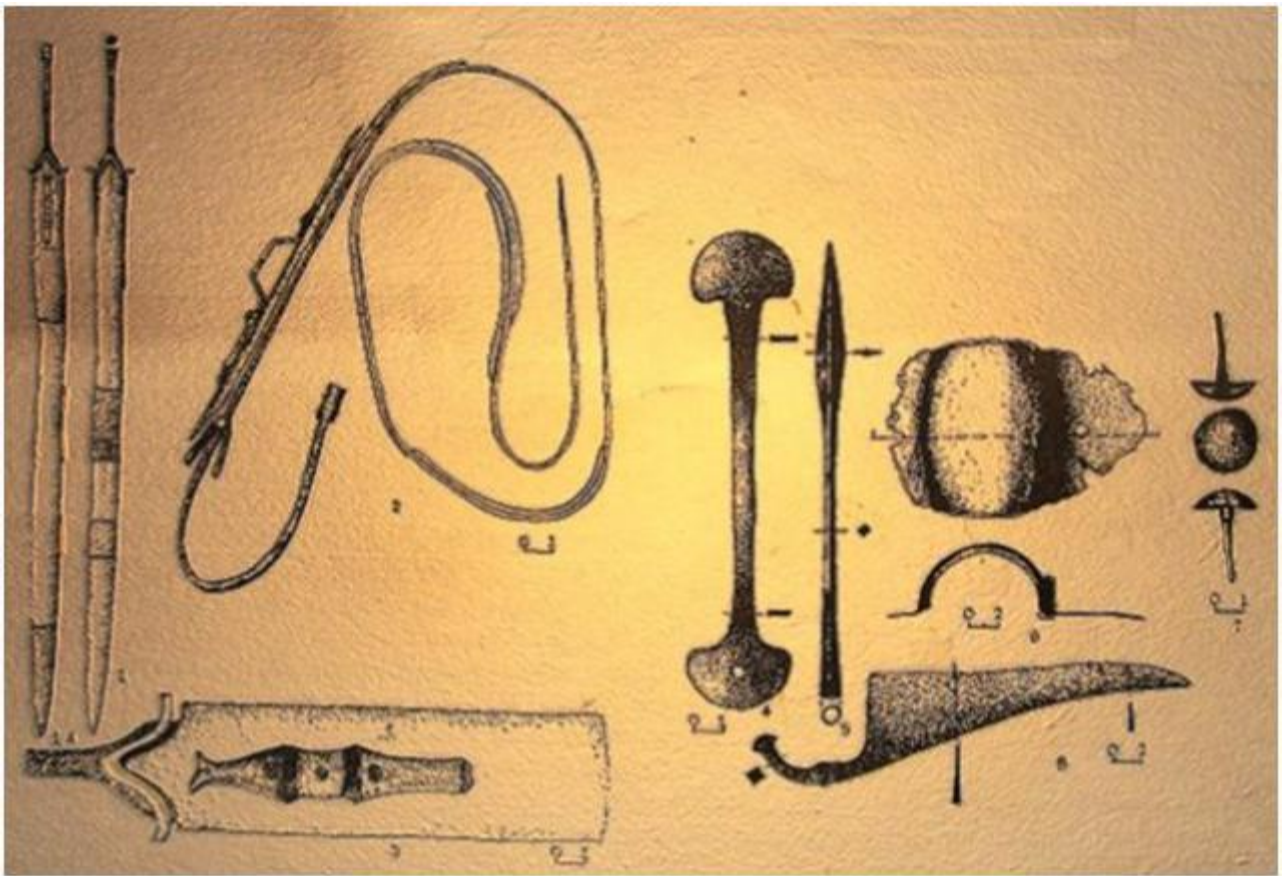


Mould for the production of Celtic ‘Battle-Axe’ fibulae from northeastern Bulgaria – Varna regional Museum

(see ‘New Material 2’ article)

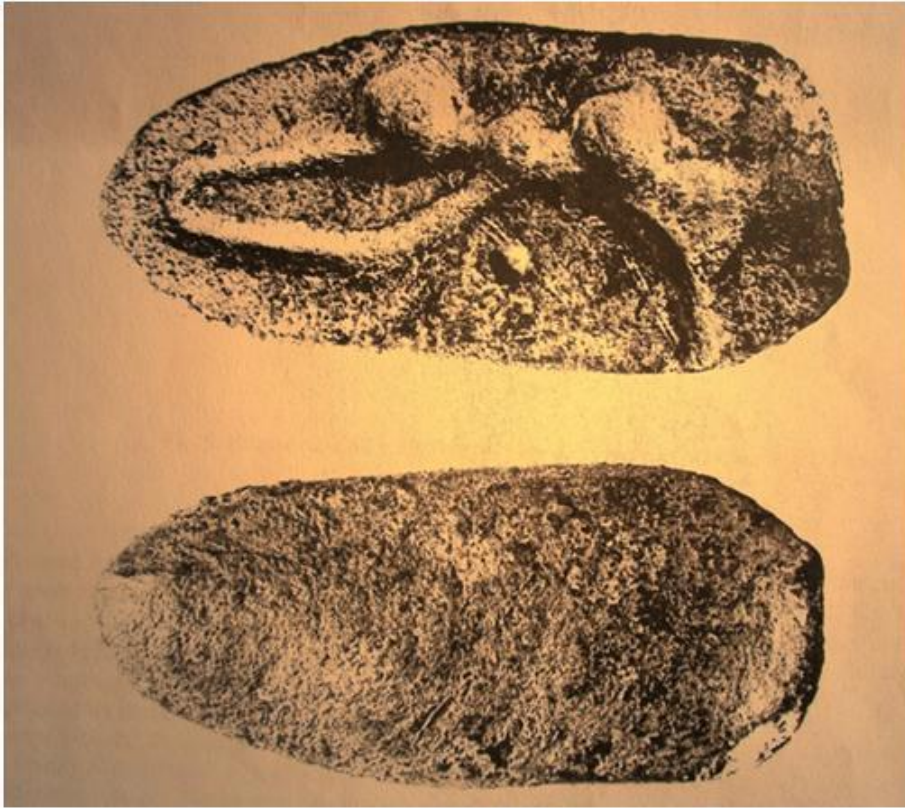
This mould is similar to another found in the Vratza region of northwestern Bulgaria. It is dated to the 1st c. BC, and was used for making Middle La Tène fibulae. A silver Celtic fibulae from Gorni Dabnik (Pleven region, Bulgaria) is very similar to the form produced by the Varna and Vratza moulds. It belongs to a certain type of nodular ‘battle-axe’ fibulae.

It appears that the main Celtic group in this area of Bulgaria were the Coralli (see ‘Coralli’ article). Another Celtic group, the *Aboulonsoi*, who were settled in the area between Tutrakan (*Trasmarisca*) and Razgrad (*Abitu*) (see ‘Celtic Settlements in n. Bulgaria’ article), were probably a sub-group of the Coralli. La Tène material in eastern Bulgaria, as far south as the valley of the Kamchya river in the w. Varna region, and sites such as the Celtic warrior burials at Kalново (Schumen region) have long been attributed to the Coralli (Domaradski 1984; on the Coralli tribe see ‘Coralli’ article, with relevant lit.).



Material from the Celtic warrior burials at Kalново, Shumen region

(After Megaw 2004 – see ‘New Material 2’ article)



Mould for the production of La Tène fibulae – Schumen region

(After Mircheva 2007 – see ‘New Material 2’ article)

The mould was used to produce fibulae of the type found at the Celtic burial site at Kalново, others found in Serbia, and another example from north-eastern Bulgaria, now in the Varna museum



Gold Celtic ‘Janus Head’ pendant from Schumen region, northeastern Bulgaria

(after Rustoiu A. 2008)

(See ‘The Mezek Syndrome’ article with relevant lit.)



Bronze Celtic chariot fitting from Bobata fortress, Schumen region

(see ‘ New Celtic Material 1’ article)

KRIVINA/ABLANA

One of the most fascinating sites to be discovered in recent years in this part of Bulgaria is the Celtic settlement at Chichov Elak on the Danube, again in the Rousse region of northeastern Bulgaria (Vagalinski L. A new Late La Tène pottery kiln with a bread oven on the lower Danube (northern Bulgaria) In: The Eastern Celts. The Communities between the Alps and the Black Sea. Božič D. (ed) Koper -Beograd 2011. p. 219-226). This site, which lay to the west of Mediolana, is near the modern village of Krivina, and in immediate proximity to the Celtic settlement of Ablana. It is again situated at a strategic location – on the confluence of the Danube and the Jantra river (now 2km. east of the Jantra, before the construction of a dam in the 1920’s the river reached the northern end of the village), thus connected via the Jantra to Celtic settlements in the interior.



Location of the Chichov Elak Site

The recent excavations at Chichov Elak (carried out by Lyudmil Vagalinski, Director of the National Institute of Archaeology with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (NIAMBAS), illustrates that this was not just a trading post, but an important Celtic economic centre in its own right, as the discovery of a bread oven and a large ceramic kiln at the site indicates. The kiln, which is dated roughly to the end of the 1st c. BC/beginning of the 1st c. AD, is especially noteworthy for a number of reasons. It's unusually large size reveals a high capacity of manufacture, i.e. the mass production of Celtic ceramic, which included late La Tène painted ware. This type of ceramic was popular among the Celtic tribes from Normandy to southwest Germany in the west, to the Scordisci in the east, and especially along the Danube (Břeň 1973, Andrews 1991, Sladič 1986 note 90, Cumberpatch 1993, Vagalinski 2011 with relevant lit.), and is usually found in large settlements such as the Celtic oppida. It was produced by professional

potters, and used by people of high social status. It is usually found together with late La Tène burnished pottery – exactly the case with the Celtic site at Krivina.



A.



B.

Pottery Kiln (A) with detail of the flue (B)

(after Vagalinski 2011)

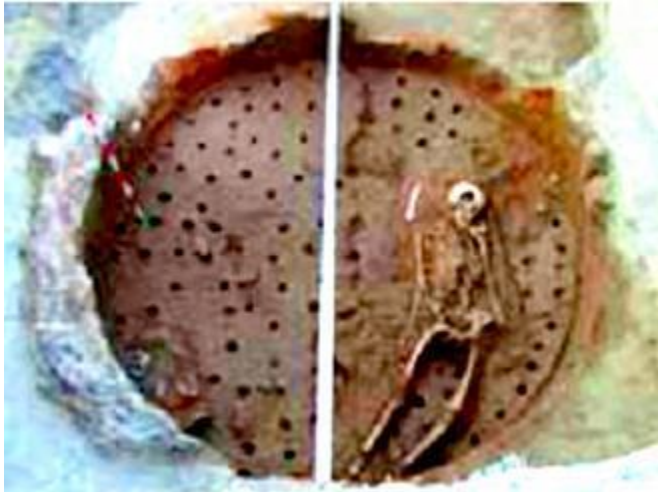
The kiln was dug into the hillside, and the Celtic potters used the hardness and the firmness of the thick loess layer, shaping the furnace (combustion chamber) and the flue (fire-tunnel) in it. The kiln is circular in form – the maximum diameter of the grate is 2.45 m (along the 45-225° axis), 2.40 m (along the north-south axis or 0-180°), 2.34 m (along the east-west axis or 90-270°), and 2.27 m (along the 135-315° axis). The height of the furnace from the kiln floor to the upper end of the support wall is 0.75 m.

Both handmade and wheel-thrown pottery were found at the site. The handmade pottery included jars and cup-like vessels. It has also emerged that the latter, which have been referred to by Bulgarian and Romanian archaeologists as ‘Thracian-Dacian types of cups’, are actually Celtic lamps (Vagalinski 2011:204).



A Handmade Jar and Painted Pottery found in the Pottery Kiln

The final phase of this Celtic settlement/economic complex is roughly dated to the end of the 1st c. BC, and in the eastern part of the kiln was found the body of a female. The skeleton, of a woman of 35-40 years of age, was 1.66 m. long, and its location and absence of any burial goods indicate that this was not a burial per se, but that the woman's body was simply discarded in the oven. The dating of the 'burial' coincides with the end of the barbarian Zaravetz culture, and the beginning of the Roman period in this region.



The Female Body found on the Kiln's Grate

(after Vagalinski 2011)

The Krivina site is the latest example of the growing contradiction in Bulgarian archaeological science. The only ceramic production center to be found in '*Late Hellenistic Thrace*' is a Celtic complex for the mass production of La Tène ceramic (Vagalinski, op cit). This once again highlights the Celtic presence in late Iron Age Thrace and, together with other discoveries in the Rousse region, and the large amounts of Celtic numismatic and La Tène material recorded in north-eastern, north-central, north-western, south-central, and south-western Bulgaria (see Archaeology and Numismatics sections), clearly illustrates that the territory of today's Bulgaria in the pre-Roman period was inhabited by a population that had a significant (in many areas, dominant) Celtic element.