

УДК:
903-4(497)"638"(049.3)
2-264(497) (049.3)
003.62(497)"638"(049.3)

N. Chausidis,
Macedonian bronzes and the religion
and mythology of Iron Age communities
in the Central Balkans,
CPR - Center for Prehistoric Research, Skopje 2017

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Culture is not just theater and saying 'Good Morning' to the neighbors. It reflects the sum of all human achievements that have been accomplished and are being accomplished, inherited and upgraded, built upon generation by generation. All of humanity's wishes, ideas and beliefs are incorporated in its culture and are reflected in the objects, buildings and machines that make up everyday life. The old Aristotelian wisdom of hylomorphism comes to mind instantly, reminding us that '*matter*' cannot '*be*' without having '*form*' and when it comes to artificially made objects and structures, their '*form*' is the mental form behind them, whether it be projected consciously or unconsciously.

Archeology has its scientific aim to reconstruct man's past through his material culture - material culture that is the reflection of his spiritual culture, which in turn cannot be comprehended just by "measuring and describing", but requires serious semiotic, cognitive and psychological analysis. There is a growing trend in all sciences, not just Archeology, to neglect this important aspect of scientific thought because it is "too subjective" and "speculative", reducing Archeology only to Archeometry. But this striving for "ultimate objectivity" is by itself a totally subjective decision of the researcher and leads to an incomplete valuation of the research object. It must be understood that the subjective, interpretative element can never be fully removed from a body of scientific work. As C.G. Jung states for the science of Psychology, it "*operates with ideas which in their turn are derived from archetypal structures and thus generate a somewhat more abstract kind of myth*", adding that it "*therefore translates the archaic speech of myth into a modern mythologem – not yet, of course, recognized as such – which constitutes one element of the myth "science"*". There are no untouchable "scientific truths" and this is where the true value of science lies – it is not dogmatic, it is constantly evolving and upgrading with new research, analyzes and ideas. We ask, what is *matter* without *form*? The answer is '*incomplete*'.

Fortunately, this year we were presented a good example of a body of scientific work which topic of interest was approached *completely*, both in its *matter*, and its *form*-

"Macedonian bronzes and the religion and mythology of Iron Age communities in the Central Balkans" by Prof. D-r Nikos Chausidis of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, published by the Center for Prehistoric Research exclusively in electronic format, fully and freely available online (http://www.cip-cpr.org/_publishing/_nikos-chausidis-makedonski-bronzi.html).

Twelve years after the publishing of his monumental "*Cosmological Images*", professor Chausidis has once again shown how to approach archeological finds and data thoroughly and systematically, trying to unravel the mysteries they possess and giving a possible (and very plausible) reconstruction of the value and meaning that they might have had for their original creators and users. In this 1200 page effort, the author's interest is a group of visually variable Iron Age bronze artifacts, dated from the 8 to the 6 century BC, with a general distribution over the territory of the Central Balkans and the geographical region of Macedonia at its core, for which they are widely known under the name of "Macedonian bronzes". These enigmatic objects have long been a fascination for researchers, but most of the publications that dealt with them up to this date were generally aimed at their chronological, typological and ethnic categorization, while their true meaning was reduced only to the unsatisfying (un)popular phrase "cult objects".

This was obviously not enough for professor Chausidis, who published his first paper on the matter in the distant year of 1988, an interest continuously following him throughout his career, culminating with the monograph "*Macedonian bronzes and the religion and mythology of Iron Age communities in the Central Balkans*" in which he tries to unravel parts of the mythology and beliefs of the Iron Age Balkan communities with an in depth iconographic and symbolic analysis of the Macedonian bronzes and their potential magic and religious purposes. According to Chausidis, these objects are a visual medium through which we can access the spiritual culture of the people that made and used them.

The monograph consisted out of eight chapters which are furthermore divided into sub-chapters and sections, together with numerous illustrations and a vast bibliography. The language is Macedonian, with a sizeable 70 page summary in English. The 370 tables of around 5000 catalogued illustrations can be viewed in parallel with reading, through a separate window opened by clicking on integrated hyperlinks, significantly easing the process without the constant need to scroll up and down.

The first chapter, titled "A bird and a vessel", is aimed towards the most iconic and widely known types of Macedonian bronzes, analyzing the symbolic relationship between the two elements – vessel and bird. The second chapter "Cluster pendants or the so-called jug stoppers" examines one of the most enigmatic representatives of the Macedonian bronzes, consisted out of a vertical body with four-side rows of elongated knobs, sometimes having an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figure at the top of the body. The third chapter "Cone-shaped objects with a pair of elongated segments on top" is dedicated to a category of bronzes that have a cone-shaped body and two symmetrically curved segments on top. The author's analyzes of these three categories of objects have shown an underlining possible connection with a liquid substance of religious importance, which leads us to the fourth chapter of the book "Macedonian bronzes and the holy potion".

The fifth chapter "Cross-shaped objects" covers all of the different types of bronzes that have a cross (two-dimensional and three-dimensional) and wheel-like shape. "Double axe-shaped objects" are the main interest in the sixth chapter of the book, examining a type of archaeological finds which are not specific for the Macedonian bronzes, but are widely

spread across different Balkan Late Bronze Age and Iron Age cultures and might be in correlation to the Macedonian bronzes. The seventh chapter of the book - "Objects with female features in the iconography" is aimed towards Macedonian bronzes that contain a woman figure or are in a symbolic relation to women. The eighth chapter "Cultural-historical tracing of mythical and religious phenomena contained within the Macedonian bronzes" analyzes the possible trans-cultural and historical relations, processes and influences that might have led to the development of the Macedonian bronzes.

Every different category of Macedonian bronzes is approached firstly by the presentation of as many examples of them as possible, already published or unpublished until now, with the purpose of drawing a general iconographic description. Then, the author checks with the views and thought of other researchers on that specific type of bronzes. After this comes a careful and wide semiotic examination of the iconographic elements of the objects, separately and in context with each other, alongside a comparison with similar iconographic representations from different cultural complexes, in both geographical and chronological sense, which were possibly connected to the makers of the Macedonian bronzes, or were on the same level of cultural development. Finally, the author gives a conclusion about the possible symbolic, magic and religious meaning of the examined artifacts.

"Macedonian bronzes and the religion and mythology of Iron Age communities in the Central Balkans" by professor Nikos Chausidis is one of the most complete and voluminous studies dedicated to the Macedonian bronzes to date. In my opinion, and I believe that professor Chausidis will agree, this monograph is not and doesn't have the pretension to be the "final truth" about the Macedonian bronzes. It is a mere beginning, a basis for all future researchers in their quest to comprehend the real value and meaning of the Macedonian bronzes and their connection to the religion and mythology of Iron Age communities of the Central Balkans.