

Late Neolithic and Late Antiquity avian finds of Chavdarova Cheshma (Simeonovgrad, Haskovo Region)

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Abstract. A total of 6 taxa of 1(2) domestic and 4(5) wild birds have been identified, among them two critically endangered (*Anser erythropus* and *Otis tarda*), one endangered (*Gyps fulvus*) and one vulnerable (*Aquila chrysaetos*). In addition *Gallus gallus domestica* and *Anser anser ? domestica* have been recorded. Chicken find came of Late Antiquity (3-4 century AD), and all other finds are dated Late Neolithic (4900-4850 BC).

Key words: Subfossil, birds, Holocene.

Introduction

The prehistoric settlement is situated in the Chavdarova Cheshma locality in the periphery of the town of Simeonovgrad (Haskovo Region). It was located on the right bank of Maritsa River (Georgiev *et al.*, 2016). The first excavations started in the 1960-s and materials and structures from the Early and Late Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron ages, as well as Roman and Medieval periods, have been revealed. The rescue excavations in 2014-2015 because of the constructing of the Maritsa Highway in the region revealed best the Late Neolithic settlement of ca. 200 decares. The pottery features allowed to date these materials to the phases III and III/IV of the Karanovo culture (i. e. 2nd half of the 6th millennium BC (Georgiev *et al.*, 2016).

Material and Methods

Recently (May, 2017) a small sample of avian finds been handed for examination by MSc Nadezhda Karastoyanova (NMNHS – BAS). They originated from the archaeological excavations (May-July 2015; depth 4.76-6.89 m) and are dated late Neolithic (Karanovo IV culture), i. e. 4900-4850 BC. Only one find (No 17 237, chicken) came of Late Antiquity (3-4 century AD) (N. Karastoyanova – unpubl. data).

The finds have been identified through the comparative osteological collections of the Vertebrate Animals Department of the National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. They are kept at the same department.

Results and Discussion

A total of 6 taxa of 1(2) domestic and 4(5) wild birds have been identified (Table 1). Four species are listed in the Bulgarian Red Data Book. Two species are critically endangered (*Anser erythropus* and *Otis tarda*), one is endangered (*Gyps fulvus*) and one is vulnerable (*Aquila chrysaetos*) (Golemanski *et al.*, 2015).

The presence of a find of domestic chicken confirms once again the wide distribution of that bird on the Balkans in the Antiquity. Until now the oldest record of *Gallus gallus domestica* came from the late Chalcolithic settlement near Hotnitsa village (Veliko Tarnovo

Region) (Boev, 2009a), and the early Bronze Age settlement near Dyadovo village (vicinity of the town of Nova Zagora (Stara Zagora Region) (Boev, 2006), both dated ca. 5000 BC, the Chalcolithic-Early-Bronze-Age settlement near Galabovo (Stara Zagora Region), dated ca. 4000 BC (Boev, 2004), and the early Neolithic settlement near Yabalkovo village (Haskovo Region), dated 4500 BC (Boev, 2009b).

The find of “*Anser anser* (Linnaeus, 1758) cf. *domestica*” could not be identified further as it represents only a distal third of a humeral bone, but dimensionally fits to females of modern non-meat specialized breeds of domestic geese and the wild Graylag goose.

Chavdarova Cheshma is the 2nd record of the Lesser white-fronted goose from the Early Neolithic in Bulgaria. So far it was found in only the settlement of Slatina (pr. Sofia City) (Boev, 2009c). Other species’ records came from the early Chalcolithic settlement in Burgas (Boev, 2009d), early Bronze Age (Urdoviza, pr. town of Kiten), medieval capital of Veliki Preslav (9-10th century AD) and Devetashka Cave (Late Pleistocene) (Boev, 1999). Obviously, both finds of the Great Bustard could be explained by the meat utilization of this highly valuable hunting bird. They once again confirm that the Thracian Plain was one of the largest regions of its distribution in the country in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic. The occurrence of *O. tarda* in Bulgaria until now documented very well the wide former distribution throughout all the country.

Remains of large diurnal raptors (including *Gyps fulvus* and *Aquila chrysaetos*) are found relatively often in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age settlements in Bulgaria (Boev, 1999, 2004). The location of the site (pr. town of Simeonovgrad) is close (10-15 km away) to two mountains (Sakar and Eastern Rhodopes), providing rock habitats for resting and nesting.

Although not numerous, the avian remains complete the information on the past (Holocene) distribution of some of the rarest at present birds species in Bulgaria in the 5th millennium BC in Bulgaria.

Table 1. Composition and representation of the examined animal remains from Chavdarova Cheshma (Simeonovgrad, Haskovo Region)

| No | Taxa | English names | Bone finds | NMNH collection No |
|-----------------------|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Domestic birds | | | | |
| 1 | <i>Gallus gallus domestica</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) | Domestic chicken | tarsometatarsus sin. dist. ad. | 17 237 |
| 2 | <i>Anser anser</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) cf. <i>domestica</i> | Graylag (? domestic) goose | humerus dex. dist. ad. | 17 442 |
| Wild birds | | | | |
| 3 | <i>Anser erythropus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) | Lesser white-fronted goose | coracoid sin. ad. | 17 245 |
| 4 | <i>Otis tarda</i> Linnaeus, 1758 | Great bustard | carpometacarpus sin. prox. ad. | 17 531 |
| 5 | <i>Otis tarda</i> Linnaeus, 1758 | Great bustard | carpometacarpus sin. dist ad. | 17 236 |
| 6 | <i>Gyps fulvus</i> (Hablizl, 1783) | Eurasian Griffon | carpometacarpus dex. prox. ad. | 17861 |
| 7 | <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) | Golden Eagle | humerus dex. prox. ad. | 17 652 |

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