

During the Late Bronze Age (1650-1050 BC) Central Macedonia functioned between two dynamically developing and significantly different centers, namely the Aegean and the Balkans, particularly evident in the second millennium BC. In this period there was an increase of population mobility in Europe and a beginning to the formation of elites which laid the foundations of European civilization. Central Macedonia, in the scope of theory of the Bronze Age, has been defined as a marginal zone. It was not included in the so-called "Mycenaean koine" - the area heavily influenced by the first mainland European civilization - Mycenaean. In Central Macedonia researches capture the influences of both culture circles (Balkan and Mycenaean), wondering whether it was a "buffer zone", by which individual Aegean elements penetrated to the northern area and beyond the Danube. Another hypothesis assumes a more active role of the Macedonian communities in interregional contacts as a "mediator", through which ideas, achievements and artifacts were freely exchanged.

The primary goal of the following project is the recognition of character, frequency and methods of contacts between prehistoric communities of Late Bronze Age living in the valleys of two watercourses: the Vardar river (Greek: *Αξιός*, Macedonian: *Βαρδάρ*) and Struma (Bulgarian: *Струма*, Greek: *Στρυμόνας*) which today are located within national borders of northern Greece, south-western Bulgaria and southern Macedonia (FYROM). Archaeologists highlight the crucial importance of those rivers; they could be the main thoroughfares between past human populations. Vardar and Struma are indirectly connected with the significant river for prehistoric times of central Europe - Danube. The phenomenon of the establishment of human settlement in defined geographical conditions is called the "logic of the rivers".

The project's aim will be achieved by the analysis of the pottery remains - the most numerous category of archaeological sources. The significance of ceramic styles, for the reconstruction of interregional cultural contacts in the Late Bronze Age, is the main theoretical foundation of the project. The starting point for the proposed study is currently the ambiguous opinion of specialists about the origins of ceramic production in the region of Central Macedonia (today's northern Greece). After almost a century of research there are multiple possibilities, such as: a northern character of pottery vessels in the region, or the importance of southern influences which are visible in the repertoire of ceramics. Moreover, archaeologists point to the unique character of the Central-Macedonian pottery craft, as well as syncretic, combining the features of neighboring areas.

The purpose of research is an attempt to verify the hypotheses described above, or present a new explanation for the issues, using methods of pottery analysis from remains that have been found on the sites of Central Macedonia, as well as the neighboring northern areas (south-western Bulgaria and southern Macedonia (FYROM)). Special attention will be focused on ceramics within so-called "incised" and "encrusted" groups, for which archaeologists suggest southern-Balkan provenance. An additional aim will be the recognition of Aegean features within ceramic repertoires discovered in the valley of the middle and upper courses of the Struma and Vardar rivers. This issue has never been the subject of detailed research. Relatively well-known and studied are interregional contacts between the Northern Aegean and Mycenaean culture. The author of the project plans to make a revision of the current ceramic source materials, found on the sites of aforementioned river valleys, which have been stored in museum and university collections in Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia (FYROM).

This presented project is a part of a larger research concept, related to the investigations carried out by an interdisciplinary and international team since year 2010. Back then a team of Greek-Polish archaeologists, chaired by prof. Stelios Andreou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), prof. Janusz Czebreszuk (Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznan) and Dr. Maria Pappa (XVI Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Thessaloniki), with financial support from the National Science Centre, began a non-invasive survey of the Anthemous river valley in Central Macedonia (*Anthemountas Valley Archaeological Project*, in short *AVAP*). Research activities included works on several archaeological sites, mainly dating to the Bronze Age.

The proposed concept of research is essentially, organizationally and personally associated with presented Polish-Greek cooperation activities in Central Macedonia since 2010. It fits into the multi-faceted scheme recognition of the prehistory of northern Greece including the analysis of the environment and material culture (ceramic vessels in the case of this submitted project) which directly reflects into proposals for interregional contacts in northern Aegean and south eastern Balkans in the Bronze Age.