

Cristian F. Schuster, Alexandra Comşa & Traian Popa, *The archaeology of fire in the Bronze Age of Romania*. Bibliotheca Musei Giurgiuensis, Monograph Series II. 212 pp., figures and tables. Giurgiu 2001. ISBN 973-8155-04-5.

The fire has been to great use for humankind during a very long time. It is familiar to us that the controlled fire gives warmth, bright and cleanses what is unclean. But there is incongruousness in this element, because the uncontrolled fire also can destroy. The totality of all these properties have done that the fire have come to play an important role in the religious life during a very long time. This has lead to the fact that fire has been assigned a central place in the cosmologies constructed by humankind. It can be reminded that fire is one of the four elements, which was thought to build up our world, according to older philosophy of nature.

In the archaeological research we have worked with cremations, the casting of bronze, cooking pits and heaps of fire cracked stones. But our archaeological narratives have rarely been focused on the fire, but more on the results of humankind's use of it. Because of this I think that it is an initiative to be praised when Dr. Dragos Gheorghiu, from University of Arts in Bucharest, created the session "The archaeology of fire" within the frame of the 6th yearly meeting of the "European Association of Archaeologists" which was held in Lisbon in September 2000. The totality of 25 persons from about half as many countries had announced their interest to read their papers about a chosen aspect of fire. The Stone- and Bronze Age oriented colleagues dominated in number, but the Iron Age and historical time were also represented. It also existed an interest for theory, method and gender issues. The following year the fire was still on the agenda at the EAA-meeting in Esslingen. The 17 colleagues from nine countries had this time come to show a greater interest for the Iron Age, but other periods and themes existed also.

At the moment, spring 2002, Dr. Gheorghiu, University of Arts in Bucharest and University of Missouri in Columbia, works with the aim to publish the papers. But in the meantime, he has come to inspire colleagues in Romania to publish a book about the role of fire during the Bronze Age. In this book we cannot only find texts about archaeological remnants, because the book opens with a chapter about folklore with connotations to fire. Here one can for instance read about by-passers throwing pieces of wood on a certain spot and thus creating a heap, which was burned as a symbolical cremation of people who died away from home (p. 16). Then follows a chapter about prehistoric remains, where one e.g. can read about in heaps deposited materials consisting of ash, charcoal and clay (pp. 27-28). As a reader one begins to think about these heaps and wonder if they could be related to "Brandopferplätzen" in the alpine area, which are depositions of cremated bones in which also ceramics and objects of bronze can be found (Krämer 1966). In the further reading one will know that the majority of longhouses during the Bronze Age seems to have been burnt down deliberately, which is a phenomenon that has ancestry in the neolithic society in Central and Eastern Europe (pp. 29-30). If one would like to know more about this one can for instance read John Chapman's article in the book in honour of Professor Jarl Nordbladh from 1999. The following chapters tells about places of cremation, cult and graves, and about what osteological analysis can tell about the size and composition of the population (pp. 80-121). In the concluding chapter one can read the question: "Why did the BA communities have to break the pots during the funerary ceremony?" In analogy

with traditions in Romania of today, the answer is given that “they must have done that for protecting the community against the spirits that wouldn’t like to leave and could find a rest in those vases” (p. 128). As a reader I would have liked a less categorically answer which also takes more consideration to the large difference between then and now. In trying to know more about destruction in the neolithic I start reading in John Chapman’s book “Fragmentation in archaeology” from 2000.

In reading my examples taken from the book in question, I suppose that they have shown that the text in “*The archaeology of fire in the Bronze Age of Romania*” can be classified as some sort of a catalogue. The text gives very limited possibilities to something more than a skin-deep watching of the phenomena treated. One has as a non-reader of the Romanian language rather limited possibilities to a further entrance into the subjects presented, because all except one of the many references are domestic. But despite of these shortages the book has the advantage that I after reading it know a lot more about the Romanian Bronze Age than I did before. The book has also come to stir my curiosity and have gotten me to read other sources. But despite this I had wished a more thorough and problematizing text. If this depends on a lack of economic resources, one could have been able to diminish the relatively vast occurrences of figures, tables and lists. Admittedly there is a saying that an image says more than thousand words, but in this case I would have liked to exchange some figures with text.

The book has its shortages, but Schuster, Comşa and Popa are nonetheless to congratulate with the publication. I write this, as the thematic stance is unique for Romanian archaeology. Next book on fire certainly will be better, or as the authors writes: “Further on, some new steps can be made.”

REFERENCES

- CHAPMAN, J., 1999. Deliberate house-burning in the prehistory of Central and Eastern Europe. In A. Gustafsson & Håkan Karlsson (ed.), *Glyfer och arkeologiska rum: en vänbok till Jarl Nordbladh*. Gotarc Series A vol 3. Göteborg: Göteborg University, Department of Archaeology: 113-126.
- CHAPMAN, J., 2000. *Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, places and broken objects in the prehistory of South Eastern Europe*. London & New York: Routledge.
- KRÄMER, W., 1966. Prähistorische Brandopferplätze. *Helvetica Antiqua. Festschrift Emil Vogt*: 111-22.

Raimond Thörn