“Producing and Consuming the Transition: Incorporating Animal Resources at the Turn from Late Bronze to Early Iron Age in SW Bulgaria”

Excavations at the Site of Bresto, Bulgaria.

Dates: July 21-August-24th

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This project began in 2012 as part of a larger survey effort to identify Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Early Iron Age (EIA) sites in the southwestern part of modern-day Bulgaria. The project is a
collaborative effort between the University of Heidelberg and New Bulgarian University (NBU). Cornell University has been involved since 2013 on a research grant from the American Research Center in Sofia. Dr. Nerissa Russell, Department of Anthropology, Cornell University serves as the project’s American co-PI. Dr. Bogdan Athanassov, NBU is the Bulgarian co-PI. Senior research members on the project include John Gorczyk, Cornell University and Philipp Stockhammer, Heidelberg.

The larger goal of the project is to understand the transition from the LBA to EIA in the Mesta Valley where the site of Bresto is located. Previous work has shown that changes to settlement patterns were driven in part by increased communication with Aegean polities through major river valleys like the Struma. Large stone structures were built on prominent places in the landscape, positioned to provide the greatest vision of the surroundings or to control movement through river corridors and mountain passes. Among the many artifacts recovered from these structures were Mycenaean ceramics, indicating a connection with the LBA polities further south. The most well studied of these, Kaimenska Chuka, was excavated by Mark Stefanovich and his team in the 1990s.

By the end of the LBA these sites were abandoned and settlements begin to arise in valleys that are not directly connected with the northern Aegean. Little is known about this “transition”, which makes sites like Bresto potential sources of invaluable information regarding the social, economic, and cultural character of this change. Bresto is located in the foothills of Pirin Mountain, in a natural corridor through the mountains through which the Mesta River flows. Therefore it sits at the intersection of two very important routes: one north-south which leads into the northern Aegean and the other east west, which leads into the Upper Maritsa Valley of Thrace.

Bresto was identified in 2012 by surface survey and explored minimally with a few test trenches. Large amounts of EIA pottery were uncovered along with the remains of a large fortification wall. In subsequent excavations we were able to identify 3 possible habitation phases. The majority of the remains are from the EIA (11th-8th c BC), including at least one destroyed house. An earlier stone wall, stratigraphically positioned below the larger wall indicates the presence of a previous settlement (LBA or very early EIA). This earlier settlement was destroyed prior to the construction of the EIA fortification wall. A small number of intrusive pits from the LIA are also present, as well as a possible LIA house floor.

As the title of the project suggests, we are interested in the roles played by animals in this transition. We are especially interested in looking for evidence of specialized stock breeding and investigating the social organization of production for this community. We are using a combination of traditional zooarchaeological methods and stable isotope analysis to answer questions of animal diet and mobility. We are also looking at what contribution hunting made to society at this time.

Though there is a zooarchaeological focus, it is not the only one. We have a large team with diverse interests. We share the same goal of trying to obtain a better picture of changing patterns of social organization at this exciting time in late prehistory. Participants in the project will have the option to
work with a wide range of material culture and to be involved at every stage of the archaeological process from excavation to artifact processing, analysis, and write-up.

**The project dates** for 2014 are July 21-August 24th. Participants are welcome to come for any length of time. Previous experience is helpful but not necessary. This is not a field school, but we have an experienced team of excavators who will instruct participants in the proper ways to excavate and record an archaeological site.

**The team** is a mix of international students: Bulgarians, Germans, Canadians, and Americans, both undergraduates and graduates. Advanced students with fieldwork experience have the opportunity to be trench leaders, responsible for supervising and documenting the work in their trench. There are three project supervisors (one American, one German, one Bulgarian) and another supervisor from the local museum in Blagoevgrad. With such varied backgrounds, we all learn a great deal from each other during the course of excavations.

**Accommodations** are in the nearby village of Banya. The team is housed at a local hotel/guesthouse which has an attached restaurant. The owners provide all three meals daily. The schoolmaster has been kind enough to lend us the unoccupied schoolhouse for use as a field house where artifacts and equipment can be stored. The village is located in the foothills of the Pirin Mountain and there is plenty of beautiful scenery. Weekends are free and participants can hike, camp, or fish. Hot mineral springs come down to the village from the mountain and so there are several spas in Banya and the nearby towns. There is a large community swimming pool which is free to use. Travel to the nearby town of Razlog (10km) and the ski resort Bansko (10km) is easy and fun; buses run daily. The project grant for 2014 covers all accommodations: hotel, food, and travel within Bulgaria. Participants are responsible for arranging their own international travel.

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Figure 1: Site location. Some sites mentioned in the text are in white.
Figure 2: EIA fortification wall
Figure 3: Excavation

Figure 4: Artifacts; From the top, L-R: Bone pins, loom weights, metal ring, spindle whorls, flint blade