

**Review of Gyucha A. & Parkinson W. A. (eds.), *First Kings of Europe. From Farmers to Rulers in Prehistoric Southeastern Europe*. Cotsen Institute of Archaeological Press, The Field Museum of Natural History. Los Angeles, 2022. Hardcover, 235 pages, ISBN 781950446247**

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The monograph “First Kings of Europe – From Farmers to Rulers in Prehistoric Southeastern Europe” has a dual purpose. Firstly, it serves as a companion to an exhibition in the Field Museum (Chicago), targeting the general public, particularly those of Balkan origin in North America (see Preface, p. xiv). Secondly, it aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of studies for scholars working on Balkan prehistory. At the exhibition in the Field Museum, open from 31 March 2023 to 28 January 2024, 26 museums and 11 countries take part, bringing together master pieces from Southeastern Europe from the Neolithic period to the Iron Age. The exhibition is the culmination of years of collaborative effort on Balkan Archaeology by the editors and their colleagues from Southeastern Europe. Its overarching objective is to bring the rich cultural heritage of the Balkans to a broad North American audience (see Preface, p. xiv).

Published in collaboration with the Field Museum of Natural History and The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, the entire volume is well-written and effectively caters to both the general public and scholars. The consistently high quality of the written content suggests meticulous editorial support. Additionally, the volume is richly illustrated, with the visual elements serving as valuable complements to the textual content. To engage this diverse audience, the editors of the volume have chosen a timely theme—examining the origins of political and economic inequality and the development of kingdoms. The topic of the emergence of institutional social inequality is well established in the current research landscape (see Beck & Quinn 2022). The factors and processes that led to social transformations continue to be the subject of lively debate, as demonstrated by Meller et al. 2016; Porčić 2019 or Bulatović et al. 2021. Although elites in general play a major role as a research subject in Balkan Archaeology, the underlying processes that produced social inequality are comparatively less well explored. Drawing on source material from Southeastern Europe, like gold objects from Varna cemetery, weaponry as well as the treasure from Borovo, the volume explores

various facets of this topic, relating to technology and craftsmanship, trade and exchange, warfare and conflict, and rituals and ceremonies. The result of this exploration are nine essays by scholars from ten different countries, all actively involved in long-term projects related to Southeastern Europe.

The foreword to the volume (pp. xvii–xxi) is written by Gary M. Feinman, whose research focuses on the emergence of inequality. The topic of multinational cooperation is a critical link to the overarching issue of “kingship” explored in this volume. This connection is drawn due to the fundamental idea that kingship, in many respects, hinges on interpersonal interactions and cooperation. Kings cannot function in isolation as they rely on the support of a retinue and build lasting relationships, – comparable to the endeavour to organize an international exhibition. The foreword presents the project's theoretical framework, yet it predominantly leans on Anglo-American literature, which is somewhat surprising given the project's central theme of cooperation, leaving one to expect the inclusion of insights from southern European colleagues.

The book provides a strong foundation, with two introductory chapters (1 and 2) emphasizing the social processes that transformed egalitarian peasant villages into hierarchically structured states or tribal kingdoms.

Chapter 1, “From Farmers to Rulers in Prehistoric Southeastern Europe” (pp. 2–25) is written by the editors of the volume, Attila Gyucha and William A. Parkinson. The primary aim of the introduction is to emphasise the social processes that effected transformation while also examining the emergence of inequality by using the Balkans as a case study. It is assumed that these societies transformed from hunter-gatherer communities characterised by situational inequality and non-hereditary power, into permanent settlements, leading to a shift in the dynamics of social interaction. They emphasise how, during the Neolithic period, institutionalisation of power was only short-lived, with growing inequality becoming more pronounced from the Bronze Age onwards. The central question that drives the introduction is thus an exploration of the historical development of kingship and the origins of monarchs. However, the primary objective affecting the whole volume is not to describe linear developments or changes attributable solely to migration. Instead, the authors aim to present a new framework that focuses on the underlying processes, presents variations, and underscores the openness of human networks in shaping the emergence of kingship.

Chapter 2 “Social Change and Elites in the Prehistoric Central and Southern Balkans” (pp. 26–41) is provided by Goce Naumov and Eleonora P. Mitrevska. The authors supplement the first introduction with case studies from the Central and Southern Balkans tracing the development of social complexity from the Neolithic period to the Iron Age. For the period, the authors tend to assume supra-regional settlement hierarchies instead of an inner hierarchisation of the communities. Only from the Copper Age onwards, with the supposedly more intensive exploitation of resources, would new sources of wealth emerge. This is reflected in fortified settlements and richly furnished graves. The accumulation of goods continued during the Metal Ages, leading to the emergence of competitive groups that transformed into elites until the Iron Age.

In addition to the introductions (Section I), the volume is divided into three further sections (II–IV) covering the Neolithic period, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age, each with 2 to 3 chapters.

The section II is titled "Neolithic and Copper Age: First Farmers, Herders, and Leaders".

Chapter 3 "Communities and Monuments in the Making: Neolithic Tells on the Great Hungarian Plain" (pp. 44–59) by Attila Gyucha, William A. Parkinson, András Füzesi and Pál Raczky delves into the examination of Neolithic Tells on the Great Hungarian Plain and explores the social and political organisation of Neolithic society through the analysis of three distinct case studies. Neolithic tells are conceptually understood as social arenas where competition and differentiation took place, but there is a notable absence of evidence supporting the existence of institutionalized and heritable inequality.

In Chapter 4 "The Emergence of a New Elite in Southeast Europe: People and Ideas from the Steppe Region at the Turn or the Copper and Bronze Ages" (pp. 60–77) by János Dani, Bianca Preda- Bălănică and János Angi, the focus shifts to the transition from the Copper Age to the Bronze Age and the emergence of a new elite in Southeast Europe. Here, the immigration of pastoral peoples from the steppe is identified as the primary driver of sociocultural change. This phenomenon is archaeologically reflected in the presence of kurgans and personal prestige goods, which indicate a shift towards a new understanding of personality and individual status within this context.

Section III, titled "The Age of Bronze: Warriors and Chiefs", examines an emerging warrior society, which is hypothesised based on various categories of evidence, including hoards, settlements, and weaponry.

In Chapter 5 "Treasures of the Warlords, Bronze Smiths, and Farmers of the Late Bronze Age; Hoard Deposition in Hungary and Transylvania" (pp. 80–107), Gábor V. Szabó and Botond Rezi, focus on various examples of hoarding practices in Hungary and Transylvania, using them as evidence to support the presence of distinct social roles, such as warlords. This chapter sheds light on the practices and artifacts that suggest the existence of individuals with significant military and leadership roles during this period.

Florin Gogâltan and Corina Borș center in Chapter 6 "Peace and War in the Bronze Age on the Eastern Frontier of the Carpathian Basin: The Evolution and Manifestation of Social Stratification" (pp. 108–123) on the development of social hierarchy and differentiation, primarily drawing insights from settlement evidence on the Eastern frontier of the Carpathian Basin. They explore how social hierarchies began to emerge and manifest themselves in the archaeological record.

In Chapter 7 "Weapons and Warriors in the Late Bronze Age of the Northern and Central Balkans" (pp. 124–143), János Gábor Tarbay and Jovan D. Mitrović take a close look at the analysis of weaponry and the appearance of warriors during the Late Bronze Age in the Northern and Central Balkans. This chapter explores the role of weaponry and the individuals associated with martial activities during this time, providing valuable insights into the social dynamics of the era.

Section IV, titled “The Age of Iron: Traders and Aristocrats”, deals with the Iron Age, with regional focuses on the Southern Balkans, the Hallstatt world of Central Europe and the Balkans, and Bulgaria.

Chapter 8 “Tribal States or Stately Tribes? The Origins of the ‘Barbarian’ Kingdoms of the Southern Balkans” (pp. 146–159) by Michael L. Galaty and Rudenc Ruka examines the nature and development of political systems in Macedonia and how Balkan ‘chiefs’ could transform themselves into ‘emperors’. Based on a diachronic analysis of the Metal Ages to Roman Period, it is assumed that no social changes can be observed at the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. The authors note that even the Greek colonization did not bring about any transformation. Only the military conflicts from the fifth century BCE onwards would have acted as a stimulus for the formation of the Macedonian state. The chapter provides a solid overview of the history of Macedonia from the Iron Age to the Roman period.

Hrvoje Potrebica and Andriana Pravidur propose a continuous developmental trajectory from the Bronze Age for Central and Southeastern Europe in Chapter 9 “Kings of Crossroads: Warriors and Traders of the Hallstatt World of Central Europe and the Iron Age Balkans” (pp. 160–179). They suggest that in the Iron Age, an elite class emerged with significant economic, political, military, and religious power. This elite group controlled crucial resources and communication routes, and their elevated status was evident in their burial practices. This section offers a comprehensive exploration of the changing sociopolitical landscape and the emergence of powerful elites during the Iron Age.

Peter Delev provides insights into the gradual consolidation of ancient Balkan nations during the Iron Age, with specific reference to Thrace in Chapter 10 “Arrayed in Gold and Silver: The Lavish Kings of Ancient Thrace” (pp. 180–195). The author gives an overview of the history of the Thracians from the Bronze and Iron Ages, during the Greek colonization up to the Odrysian Kingdom and the Hellenistic period. After the historical outline, he describes the Thracian culture based on its political organization, the settlement system, religion, and burial customs as well as the treasure finds.

Despite the undeniable amount of effort invested in the realization of this kind of exhibition and the composition of this kind of volume, the book raises several issues. The use of ‘Southeastern Europe’ in the book’s title is somewhat misleading as it primarily focuses on the Hungarian Plain and Transylvania. However, (Northern) Greece, a region highly relevant to the topic, is conspicuously absent, despite its significance in current research. It would have been appropriate to address this geographical emphasis or reconsider using the term ‘Southeastern Europe’ in the book’s preface.

The aim of the volume is clearly formulated at the very beginning to create a new framework for understanding the emergence of complex societies, namely kingdoms, using examples from Southeastern Europe. However, even by the end of the volume, readers may still struggle to pinpoint what precisely this new framework entails and how the identified processes contribute to the development of the proposed kingship model. Further clarification and exposition of the book’s central

theoretical framework and the causal link between these processes and the emergence of kingship would have enhanced the reader's understanding.

The social processes that led to social change might be summarized as follows: While the book effectively highlights the role of readily available resources in the sociopolitical development of the Balkans, it predominantly considers this development to have been driven by resource control and exploitation. The shift in settlement patterns during the Neolithic period, transitioning from small, dispersed villages to larger, centralized settlements known as 'tells', brought about transformations in coexistence and the corresponding societal norms. During the transition to the Bronze Age, the authors focus on a fundamental shift in the perception of the individual. The arrival of pastoralists from the steppe brought about a significant focus on the single individual, exemplified by single burials under kurgans and the presence of prestige objects connected with single individuals. Simultaneously, a male-centered worldview gained prominence, and patriarchal forms of coexistence were introduced. In the subsequent Metal Ages, these patriarchal households were characterized by sword-bearing leaders, while a warrior class emerged through conflicts and wars over resources. The societal framework retained a masculine ethos, with warlords continuing to serve as the backbone of the social order during the Iron Age. During this period, a cosmopolitan elite ideology evolved, incorporating Mediterranean goods to signify status and prestige. In general, the Southeastern European communities remained organized into tribes, while Macedonia and Thrace employed conflict and warfare as catalysts for state formation.

Within the volume, the emergence of a hierarchically structured society is notably marked by a strong gender bias, predominantly framing it as a male-driven endeavor. The prevailing perspective overwhelmingly spotlights men as the primary agents of change, overshadowing the contributions of other social groups, which are relegated to a peripheral role. Despite the existence of ample evidence, such as the opulent women's burials during the Iron Age in North Macedonia, which starkly contrast the relatively modest men's graves and conspicuously showcase wealth, discussions on the sociocultural development of Balkan societies in prehistory largely overlook the roles of women. The volume's overarching narrative seems to be heavily influenced by the paradigm of the mobile warrior hero, which consistently dominates the discussions. This perspective could benefit significantly from a more inclusive exploration of the diverse roles and contributions of various social groups within the dynamic and intricate sociopolitical landscape of the Balkans. It's worth noting that all the editors of this volume are men, and only four chapters are co-authored by women, and in those cases, they are not listed as the first authors. This gender disparity raises concerns about the diversity and inclusivity of perspectives presented in the book. A more comprehensive examination of concepts related to warrior ideologies, chieftains, kingdoms, and elites, along with a broader exploration of advanced and nuanced ideas, would have enriched the book's depth and offered a more holistic view of the complex historical dynamics at play.

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