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Overview of the ceramic finds in the Lăpuş Bronze Age barrow necropolis (NW Romania)

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The Lăpuş archaeological site in NW Romania is the largest surviving Late Bronze Age barrow necropolis in the Eastern Carpathian area and functioned as gathering places for funeral rituals e.g. feasting and sacrifice. Based on the C^{14} investigation on burned wood and cereals, the site was dated in the 13^{th}-12^{th} century B.C. A large number of barrows were discovered covering about 1.5 km^2. The building remains erected on a soil platform and set on fire afterwards were covered by a new soil layer creating a new platform on which a further building was erected, fired and covered with another clay layer thus creating a barrow. The excavated burial mounds contain high amounts of ceramic fragments, burnt daub from the earthen walls, ceramic slags, cremated animal bones and plants, bronze weapons, bronze and golden jewellery. The axe exhumed here is most likely one of the earliest iron artefacts in Europe. So far no remnants of any type of ceramic or smelting kilns were identified.

The ceramic sherds represent large conical necked vessels, richly decorated fine ware cups and bowls, as well as very coarse large pots. Many potsherds show secondary firing e.g. cracked black surface, partial melting and/or deformed shape. It is assumed that the many thousands of sherds are intentionally broken pots during ritual feasting. Optical microscopy in polarized light, X-ray diffraction, electron microprobe as well as major, minor, trace and rare earth elements geochemistry by ICP-MS were used for the study.

Quartz, K-feldspar and plagioclase, and some ilmenite, rutile, zircon, spinel predominate as clasts in a mainly illitic groundmass. Fragments of quartzites, andesites to basaltic andesites, silts and sandstones are also found. Small pieces of older ceramics (crushed potshards) and slags are relatively frequent.

The geochemistry points to two main groups, a) high-silica ceramics and b) low-silica ceramics. The high-silica ceramics has 71-78 wt.% SiO_2 but is relatively low in Al_2O_3 (10-13 wt.%) and Fe_2O_3 (2-5 wt.%)/ The low-silica ceramics shows 56-66 wt.% SiO_2 and relatively high amounts of Al_2O_3 (15-23 wt.%) and Fe_2O_3 (4-8 wt.%). CaO, Na_2O and K_2O are in the same range for both ceramic groups. The mineralogy-petrography and geochemistry of the ceramic suggests at least two sources/production places.

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