

## *Slice of culture 3,000 years thick*

**W**HO WERE THE PEOPLE who first settled the land of present-day Bulgaria? They are known only by their works. Many scholars believe they migrated from nearby Greece and Asia Minor; by 6000 B.C. they were scattered in small settlements across the Balkan region.

They arrived as Stone Age farmers, but before their culture changed again after 3000 B.C., their accomplishments had carried southeastern Europe into the age of metal. Perhaps as early as 5000 B.C. they began to develop the skill, of smelting and casting copper, uninfluenced, the author believes, by earlier metalworking technology in the Near East.

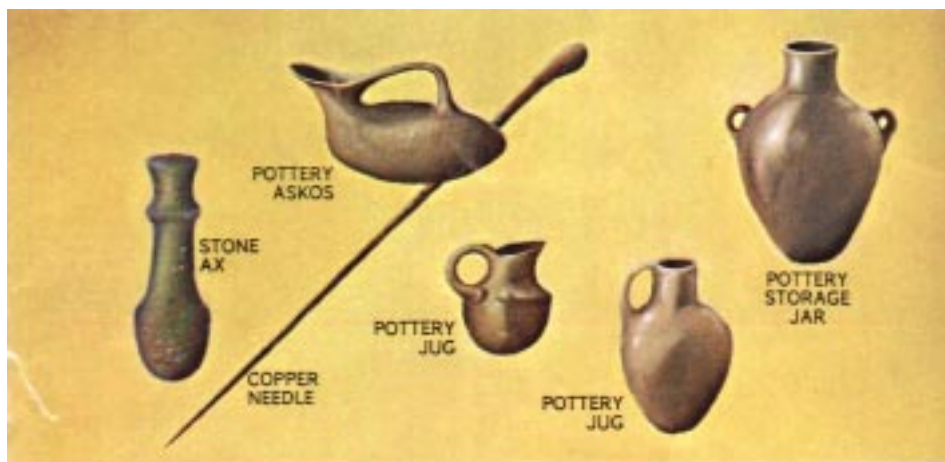
Their culture is documented in the forty-foot settlement mound at Karanovo (below), where excavation by Bulgarian archaeologist Georgi I. Georgiev has revealed artifacts (right) and house plans of three millennia. Flat-topped settlement mounds were formed in lay-



ers over the centuries as wattle-and-mud houses were leveled and rebuilt about once each generation.

Scholars debate the significance of a 5,500-year-old clay plaque uncovered at Karanovo (above). Only one other such find, though of different design, has been found in Bulgaria. Some experts cite evidence of attempts at writing; others insist that without more examples the markings can only be considered symbols, possibly used in religious ceremonies.





**3000 B.C.**

The top layers of the Karanovo mound, from the Bronze Age, reveal a culture in transition. Pottery is utilitarian, without decoration. Few items of bronze or copper are present.



**5000 B.C.**

Artifacts of a prosperous, stable society fill the Copper Age layers. Necklaces of salt-water shells indicate trading, and the quality of the relics suggests craft specialization. Pottery was enhanced with silvery graphite and red and yellow ocher, an iron ore pigment. Early copper 'items, such as earrings of idols and figurines, were made by hammering copper nuggets. As control of fire advanced, copper was smelted and cast into tools and weapons.



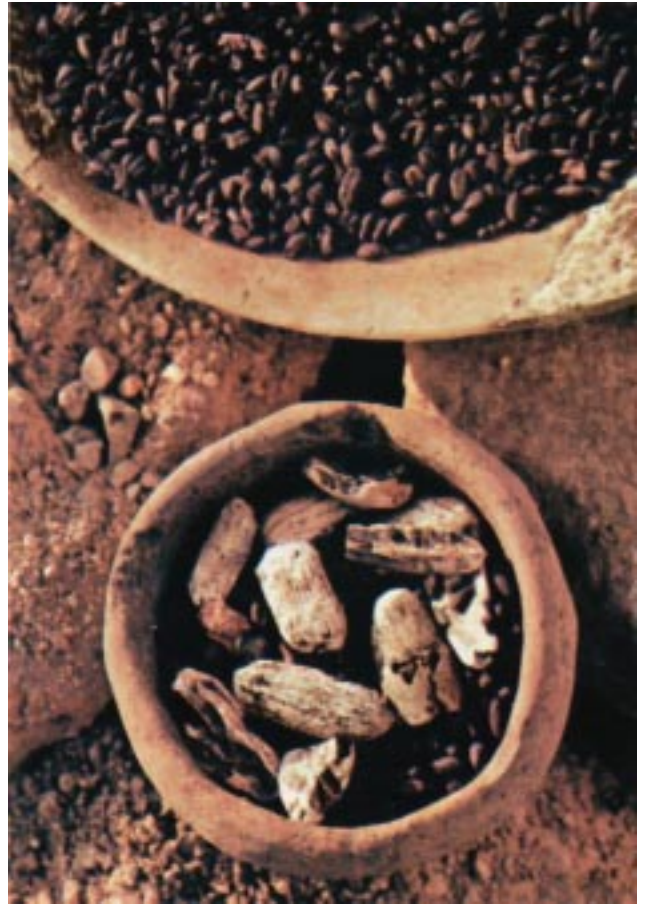
**5400 B.C.**

Clay vessels fitted with open handles and clay dishes supported by legs characterize these late Stone Age layers. Most pottery was decorated with incised or relief markings rather than with pigment. Clay statues may have been created as idols or merely as figurines.



**6000 B.C.**

Graceful pottery, often decorated with white pigment, and female figurines with exaggerated buttocks appear in the lowest levels of the mound. Bone spoons show careful craftsmanship; flint embedded in the natural curve of a deer antler made a sickle.



**Homes were quickly abandoned** about 5500 B.C. when fire swept a Stone Age settlement. Its ruins (**below**) were discovered in the city of Stara Zagora.

A clay vessel and necklace of imported shells (far left) escaped destruction, but most pottery was broken into shards. Depressions in the floor were fire rings used to dry foods such as wheat and acorns (left), found in bowls at the site. Beyond a dome oven (below, center background) the remains of another house are illuminated. These two homes shared a wall, unlike separated dwellings nearby and at neighboring Karanovo.

Five miles away, and nearly a thousand years later, a copper mine at Ai Bunar began to supply a growing metal industry. Many early metalsmiths may have been potters who had learned to control fire, producing temperatures high enough to separate copper from its ores. A smith then remelted the extracted copper in a crucible (below), pumping a goatskin bellows to heat the fire. Molten copper, poured into stone molds, contracted as it cooled and was easily removed. Rough edges were polished with stone.

But copper, a soft metal, never entirely replaced stone as a material for tools and weapons. Metal was presumably more prestigious than utilitarian in Europe until the third millennium B.C., when copper was combined with tin to create bronze.

