



THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATION AND THE WORLD'S OLDEST GOLD

50 YEARS
OF NEW HORIZONS IN PREHISTORY



Visit **VARNA**
Varna | Official Visitor Guide



TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER
VARNA 9000,
"STS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS" SQ.
+359 52 820 690



VARNA MUSEUM OF ARCHEOLOGY

VARNA'S GOLDEN NECROPOLIS
5TH MILLENNIUM BC



#VARNAGOLDCIVILIZATION

9000 VARNA,
MARIA LUISA 41 BLVD.
VISITING HOURS:
10:00 – 17:00H
MONDAY (DAY OFF)

+ 359 52 681030

ARCHAEO.MUSEUMVARNA.COM

VARNA'S GOLDEN NECROPOLIS

5TH MILLENNIUM BC



The Varna Eneolithic (or Copper Age) cemetery was found by accident in the autumn of 1972 during excavation work in the western industrial zone of the coastal city of Varna, Bulgaria. The cemetery was situated approximately 400 meters north of modern Varna Lake. The burial ground occupied a terrace that sloped gently southward toward the water's edge, at an elevation of twelve to eighteen meters above modern sea level. The cemetery is dated in 4600–4300 BC. It was created by a society, today known as the Varna culture, that buried its leaders with many weapons and ornaments, including stunning quantities of gold.

Excavations were conducted at Varna over a period of twenty years (1972–1991) and exposed an area of 7,500 square meters containing 315 graves. Interest in this unique burial site is due to the abundance and the variety of grave gifts, especially the gold artifacts, which number more than 3,000 and whose total weight exceeds six kilograms. Their allocation in the graves is remarkably unequal: Sixty-two graves yielded some gold objects, but the weight of gold in just four graves (1, 4, 36, and 43) accounted for more than five kilograms. Three of these (1, 4, and 36) were cenotaphs. **Such a concentration of gold artifacts has not been recorded elsewhere in the fifth millennium BC.** The weight and the number of gold finds in the Varna cemetery exceeds by several times the combined weight and number of all of the gold artifacts found in all excavated sites of the same millennium, 5000–4000 BC, from all over the world, including Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The clear distinction in the type and the quality of the grave goods, determined by the social rather than the material status of the deceased is proof of social stratification in the Late Copper Age in the Balkans, a result of the emergence of new elements in social and economic development – mining, metallurgy, and the related increase in long-distance trade and exchange. The separation of crafts and proto-trade from farming and agriculture provided conditions for the concentration of power in the hands of a restricted group of community members – those buried with abundant and numerous grave goods. From this point of view the Varna cemetery illustrates the early stage of the emergence of a class-segregated society, a proto-type of social and political structure.

As attributes designating the social status of their owners, gold objects were sacred and symbolic rather than indicators of wealth. This conclusion is applicable to the rest of the finds as well. For example, most of the long flint blades and copper battleaxes were not actively used weapons but instead prestige objects, symbols of power that indicated the social significance of their owners. The gold-decorated handles of copper shaft-hole axes in Graves 4 and 43 suggest that these objects served as scepters. The ornaments made of rare minerals and Aegean mollusk shells can be interpreted from the same perspective. Although some of the ornaments (or similar ones) might have been part of everyday attire, their placement in burial pits suggests that they were indicators of the social status and not the wealth of their owners.

