

# **CERTAIN OBSERVATIONS UPON THE NECROPOLISES DATED BACK FROM THE 5<sup>th</sup> TO THE 1<sup>st</sup> CENTURY B.C. IN NORTH-EASTERN BULGARIA**

**RUMEN RADEV**

We have assumed the thesis that a territory can be generally approached from two basic directions - geographical and cultural-historical, and also that the investigation of the necropolises is a first-rate archaeological source. Having this as a base we made certain observations upon the necropolises, as regards their topography and the possibility of a certain semantic meaning in their location and structure. In the course of our investigations a number of peculiarities and regularities were found out, concerning the above-mentioned aspects - topography and semantically conditioned location and structure. We need the specification that the following observations are just preliminary because of the irregular character of our investigations and are based exclusively upon published material.

The comparative analysis of the topographic location of the necropolises on the territory confined between the Danube to the North, the Yantra river to the West, the Balkan mountains to the South, the Black Sea to the East and the North-Eastern boundary of Bulgaria shows that the necropolises are, in all cases, located near water /a river, a gully or a dry valley/. So we can draw the first peculiarity - that is the important role of the hydrographic network for the location of the necropolises. Another characteristic feature, having the value of a regularity, is that the necropolises are usually situated upon areas of land dominating over the vicinity. Those can be heights /for example Kiulevtcha, Kalugeritsa, Drumevo/, plateaus or steep river-banks as is the case with the majority of the necropolises - Ravna, Dobrina, Zlataritsa, Dolna Rositsa, Sboryanovo-1,2 and 3 because the rivers in the North-Eastern part of Bulgaria cut their beds deeply into the ground so that their banks are steep, with a certain declination to the river, the gully or the dry valley.

The two-dimensional location of the necropolises in relation to the settlements gives us the next regularity. In most cases they are situated North and West of the settlements /including North-West/, and hardly ever North-East and East of them /Borovo, Branitchevo, Professor Zlatarski/. In the situation of a necropolis in relation to a settlement, whether ancient or contemporary, the above mentioned basic directions are kept.

We have data concerning a necropolis situated to the South of a settlement - the one near the village of Kralevo, in the Targovishte region /the Fore- Balkan lands/.

Obviously, one of the major requirements concerning their location was in those early days, the existence of a good visual link between them, which directs our thought towards a conscious and careful arrangement of the necropolises.

For the time being the attempt of building a system that explains the location of the necropolises in relation to the settlements will be of no value, because of the insufficient data concerning the sanctuaries. Most likely it won't take too long to throw light upon the situation in the archaeological complex Sboryanovo with its compactly located sacred territories, the investigation of which shows a steady chronological continuity even to this day.

The largest groups of necropolises are found in the drainage of the rivers Rusenski Lom and Provadijska, the upper course of the river Kamchia, in Sboryanovo and the region of the town of Ispirih, Odesos and its hinterland, and yet we must bear in mind the still imperfect archaeological mapping of North-Eastern Bulgaria.

The problem with Dobrudja, the Fore-Balkan areas and the Balkan mountains still stands over. But in spite of all these shortcomings, we can accept the hypothesis of a conscious distribution of space and the functions of the four cardinal points.

The problem still exists if we observe the orientation of the necropolises.

With the so called "low-rate" necropolises we have orientation East-West /for example Ravna, Dobrina Drumevo, Galata/ while those with typical high- tomb architecture /they are few / have orientation North-South /for example Yankovo, Kravevo, Sboryanovo, Odesos/.

The comparative investigations of planning and the components of the funeral rites, all these in accordance with topography, suggests a more valuable linking of the peculiarities, their studying and argumentation. Here are some data received by studying the combination of geographic location and the type of tomb. The first group of necropolises is characterized by urns. The main idiosyncrasies are: East-West orientation, the tumuli are arranged in an arc, which is opened to the West and there is a higher concentration of tumuli in the Eastern half of the arc /Dobrina, Branichevo, Svalenic/. The case with the Ravna necropolis is identical - it is the only one of its kind, included in a group which combines cist graves and urns, with the one peculiarity that the cist graves are concentrated in the Eastern half, while the urns, arranged in an arc, close the necropolis from its West side. As regards the funeral rites, we can point out that all the burials are done by way of cremation, the bones are kept in an urn quite often covered with a bowl; covering with other vessels is rarely to be found. There are several ways of laying the urns in the tumuli: some are laid straight on the ground floor /T3-Dobrina, T4-Branichevo/, others are laid on slabstones/T9-Branichevo, T3 & T4 Dobrina/. But most frequently the urns are laid in a previously dug pit/T1, T2, T5-Branichevo, T1 & T2 - Dobrina/ T3 in Branichevo is the only tomb in which the bones are laid straight into the pit, dug in the ground floor. The cremation, except M1 in Branichevo, is done, as a rule, outside the tomb, but the places of cremation have not been found, and, what is more, cremation is done regardless of the sex. T1 in Branichevo is the southernmost one in the necropolis. Almost all the tumuli that have been investigated have stone circles and that is particularly relevant to Dobrina. As it was said, cremation was done regardless of the sex, but we must emphasize the fact that women's burials are richer in gifts than men's /T3,8,9,20,23 - Dobrina, T1 & T3 - Branichevo, Banovo/. In the Branichevo necropolis the richest burials are in T10, where we have interesting stone works which are supposed to be of Celtic origin. Armaments and a harness were found there, in the man's grave. In T12 in Dobrina we have two burials - of a man and of a woman. The man was endowed with an iron rein and an iron button, while the woman was endowed with an iron labrys. The iron knives that were usually put in the graves as gifts, were, in most cases, crescent-shaped.

The dating of this type of necropolises shows that burying the mortal remains in ordinary urns goes back to the period from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 3<sup>d</sup> century B.C.

The next group of the necropolises is characterized by the cist graves and includes those near Kyulevcha, Drumevo, Professor Zlatarski, Kalugeritsa, Lavino, some single graves in tumuli near Omarchevo, Galata, Odesos. Cremation is quite commonly done, as a rule, outside the territory of the necropolis. Usually in each necropolis there is just one cremation which

has been done inside the sacred territory, as is the case with grave 11 near Kyulevcha and grave 1 near Drumevo.

The cist graves are oriented usually North-West-South-East, their entrances either the South, or from the East, while the gifts are usually laid near the North and the West walls. According to the data, the tumuli that cover the graves have three-strata vertical structure, and with the exception of T6 in the Professor Zlatarski necropolis, there are no secondary /that is subsequent/ burials in the tumuli. There are two interesting characteristics. The tumuli in which cremation is done on the spot are the end of the necropolises. For example grave 11 near Kyulevcha is the last in a row and is 52 metres East of the rest. Its orientation is North-South and dead child has been cremated there. The same orientation has the grave in tomb 1 near Drumevo, which is the North-West-ernmost in the necropolis. It's a man grave and the archaeologists have found a rein, horse bones and some amphora remnants there.

T1 near Professor Zlatarski is in the Northern part of the necropolis, the cist grave covers the diagonal NW-SE. A man and a woman have been buried there. An iron labrys has been discovered near the woman, and a rein near the man. The majority of the burial gifts are in the women's graves, though, as a whole, they are not quite rich. Graves 2 & 3 near Drumevo and the grave in M3 near Professor Zlatarski prove this statement. The necropolises of this kind are mainly concentrated round the Provadia plateau. The burying of the dead in cist graves characterizes the period from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 3<sup>d</sup> century B.C.

The burials in the Ravna necropolis are done by cremation and once again it is regardless of the sex, but if we bind together the funeral rites with the tomb fittings, we shall see that the cist graves are predominantly women's. We can also point out that graves are richer in funeral gifts /for example 10, 14, 15, 17, 32 and some others/. The only exception, where we have cremation on the spot, is grave Nr.2 in the Southern part of the necropolis. By contrast with the rest of the graves here we have a pyre discovered in the Eastern part of the necropolis, about 6 metres away from the last grave. The funeral pile represents a circle marked by crushed stones and its diameter is 5,7 metres.

The graves near Ravna are usually East-West situated and only the North- Eastern-most one /Nr. 7 / is North-South situated. Two burials are discovered in grave Nr. 7 - of a man and of a woman.

Indisputably, the richest cist graves are in Galata and Odeson. The one in Galata is three-cornered /the only one of its kind/ and the second one is masoned and covered with square tiles/slabstones.

The fourth group includes one-cell sepulchres of the so called "sarcophagus" type. They are concentrated around two settlements - Odesos and Kyolmen- and those sepulchres are rich in funeral gifts. Our information concerning Zlokuchene /Ivanski/Staroselska - with its unique case of cremation on the spot - Izgrev, Svetlen/. Ayazlar/ and T18 in Sboryanovo is still insufficient. The investigations show that the sepulchres of this type are almost equal in size. They are built of hewn slabstones revetting a previously dug rectangular pit, whose ground floor is covered either with rammed soil or with slabstones. Their orientation is North-South /T1,2,3,4, near Kyolmen, Galata/ and only two of the cases it is East-West /M1-Odesos, M-Topolite/. The burials are done either by cremation or by inhumation, the latter being more common. The heads of the inhumated are always to the South or to the East.

Comparing the location of the funeral gifts within the graves /we mean the cases when we are sure of their original location/ we can suppose that the funeral gifts are carefully arranged

in relation to the four cardinal points. With few exceptions /M4-Kyolmen and Zlokuchene/ the adornments are in the North-East corner of the grave, the weapons - in the Southern part, the amphorae - chiefly in the North-West corner and rarely in the North-East one. We need more data about the territories surrounding the graves. T1 in Kyolmen is the only man's grave in which we have found a harness /just a part of a rein/, while in the women's graves we usually have funeral wreaths /T2 & 5 - Galata, T4 - Odesos/. The finds prove what has already been said about the above-mentioned necropolises - women's graves are richer in funeral gifts. The vertical section of the tumuli /where it has been made/ displays three strata. The group of the beehive tombs in North-East Bulgaria still has few representatives. Besides the two tombs near Yankovo and the one near Dolna Rositsa, other three /near Kavarna/ have been discovered lately. With the last three tombs are similar in construction, they are East-West oriented and their entrances are to the East. We have cremation and partial inhumation in both cases, respectively a skull in Tumulus and two bones in T2. Besides this, we have two horse burials in each tomb. Five /subsequent/ secondary cist graves have been found in T2. In spite of the constructions the two tombs differ in orientation, North-South and, respectively, left-right. The tomb in M1 has a damaged North wall, while the same wall in M2 has been repaired by the unknown builders who have used three hewn blocks. There are differences in the location of the horse burials, and we should also emphasize the availability of a pillar, a base, and mouldings in one of the tombs.

The tomb in Dolna Rositsa, classified as a beehive tomb, has a different construction. It consists of two chambers - an oval and a round one - which are not connected. The builders have used flat stones and also stones with naturally smooth surfaces. The walls are in good repair at a height of one metre from the ground floor. No traces of the burial have been found. Twenty stone balls of different size have been discovered in the surrounding soil as well as five subsequent burials /as was the case with M2 near Yankovo/ of medieval origin. After publishing the data concerning the beehive tombs near Kavarna and the data concerning contingent discoveries we will have the opportunity to compare tombs of this type located in different subregions in North-West Bulgaria. Those, discovered by now can be related to the period between the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

The situation is quite different with those tombs that are characterized by semi-cylindrical overarchings. We already have two groups of the type - one in the Black Sea zone - Odesos and its hinterland. The second group is larger in number. We have information about two single overarched tombs - one in Yankovo and one in Ruets. Only two tombs of this type are East-West situated and they are in the Odesos region. All the rest are situated North-South, and those three in Sboryanovo - North-West - South-East. The entrances are from the South, the East or the South-East. The dug-in, one-chamber tombs are typical for the Black Sea zone, as is the case with the one in Ruets. The tomb near Yankovo is a two-chamber one, roughly masoned. T12 and T13 in Sboryanovo are also two-chamber tombs and the only three-chamber tumuli is the one near Sveshtari. Our investigations show that just some parts of the body are buried while the bones are buried in the Eastern half of the burial cell. Horses are buried in all tombs and we have also found parts of harnesses as well as traces of very complicated funeral rites. The tumuli covering the tombs have a three-strata vertical structure. We should mention the interesting fact that rocks are placed in the antechambers of the tombs near Yankovo, Eshill teppe, Ginina mogila and of the beehive tombs near Yankovo. A certain dislocation of the axes of the tombs is noticed. /Mound "Vladislav Varnenchik", T12 and T13 - Sboryanovo/. Sometimes the trapezium shaped entrances are



also changed. Data about burials in large clay vessels /doliums/ is not sufficient for a comparison and the pyramidal works in the Kralevo necropolis are unique. Several square clay altars have been discovered - Sveshtary, Borovo, Yankovo /T1/, a sacrificial altar of the two parts in Slavenik and a combination of an altar /eschara/ and a sacrificial pit /botros/ in Kralevo. The last two are unique for the region.

The burials of horses and dogs, traces which have been found in the necropolises, are quite interesting. Horses are invariably buried by placing the carcass in the beehive tombs or in the barrel-vaulted tombs while in the cist-graves, the urns and the "satcophagi" the burials are symbolical and are usually done by placing reins into the ground.

The horse carcasses are laid on their left side and only two of them are decapitated. By contrast with the horses the dogs lie on their right sides and most of them are decapitated. /Mumdjilar, Dolna Rositsa/.

The buried horses are usually North-South oriented, while the dogs lie East-West. The horse burials are usually situated in the antechambers of the tombs or in the moats of the tumuli.

As far as human burials are concerned they are usually done by cremation and regardless of the sex.

For our future observations we need more accurate anthropological investigations in order to carry out a precise comparative analysis towards certain conclusions and definitions. Data, allowing a kind of classification of the tumuli in the necropolises, is still insufficient.

Despite the preliminary character of our observations upon the necropolises in North-East Bulgaria, we can deduce the following basic assertions:

1. We can differentiate several regions in the North-Eastern part of Bulgaria, each having its own centre, which coincides with the so called "rich" necropolises. All this helps us to differentiate the tribal groups within the Getic tribal community.

We shall outline them along the direction West-East. The first covers the drainage of the river Russenski Lom and has Borovo as its centre. Sboryanovo is the centre of the second region. The third lies to the East of the line Ovche Polle - Rishki Prohod in the Balkan mountains and Yankovo is the centre. The fourth is situated to the North of the Preslav mountain and reaches the Popovo and the Razgrad heights.

The fifth region includes the valley which is surrounded by the Preslav and the Dragoevo mountains from the North, the Lisa mountain from the West and the Kotel-Varbitsa section of the Balkan mountains from the South. The centre of the fifth region is Kralavo-Ruets. Odesos is the centre of the sixth one, which covers the Black Sea zone. The question about Dobrudja and the region situated to the East of the Yantra river is left open due to incomplete research.

2. The topographic situation of the necropolises, the peculiarities of their horizontal planning and those of the funeral rites prove the existence of a settled conception, according to which everything is carried out.

3. The precise dating of the necropolises "fits" them into the period between the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 3<sup>d</sup> century B.C., and all this asks the question of the historical reality in the North-Eastern Thracian lands after the first half of the 3<sup>d</sup> century.

We are aware of the preliminary character of our observations and that only future research will confirm or reject them.

