

## ETHNOCULTURAL PROCESSES IN SOUTHERN DOBROGEA DURING THE V-TH MILLENNIUM BC

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**Abstract:** The region of Dobrogea was uninhabited up to the beginning of the Late Neolithic, when the Hamangia culture appeared (around 5300-5200 BC). The southernmost point known of the culture during its first phase is the settlement at Durankulak-Nivata. In the beginning of the Early Chalcolithic the Hamangia people gradually spread in Southern Dobrogea and established relations with their neighbors in the region. These relations were peaceful, based on exogamic matrimones and trading. The process of “mixing” of both populations is clearly visible in the number of changes in the burial rite during the last phase of the Hamangia culture which shows the strong influence of its neighbors. Around the end of the Early Chalcolithic the Hamangia expansion spread south to the already inhabited area of the Varna lakes. This led to armed conflicts with the local population, as a result of which the Hamangians settled down in the region. The subsequent assimilation of the local people, as well as the preceding integration processes led to the formation of the Varna culture. In its first phase evidences for armed conflicts are still visible. The subsequent phases seem to have been more peaceful and this peace led to expanding trade relations with the neighbors as well as with remote areas. In the last quarter of the V-th millennium BC an invasion of steppe tribes began (probably connected with the Sredni Stog II culture or its variants) which led to the extinction of the Chalcolithic civilization in Northeastern Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** late neolithic, early chalcolithic, burial rite, ethnocultural.

### First stage: 5300/5200 – ~ 4600 cal. BC.

Around 5300/5200 cal. BC the bearers of the Hamangia culture appeared in Dobrogea, which was uninhabited until then. Most of the authors suggest southern (Anatolian) origin of the culture (Berciu 1966, 52-57; Haşotti 1997, 15-17 with references; Comşa, Cantacuzino 2001, 194-198). However, the data from recent researches provide grounds to seek its provenance to the north or northeast. A great part of the Hamangia people belonged to the proto-europoid racial type (Nekrasov et al. 1990, 185) (with tall, massive bodies) which has not been attested in the earlier Neolithic cultures south of the Danube River<sup>1</sup> (Boev 1972, 89-90). This type may be related to the Late Mesolithic population that inhabited the region north of the Danube

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<sup>1</sup> The sole exception (from Devetashka cave) does not have sure stratigraphic context.

delta<sup>2</sup>. The idea is also supported by the Mesolithic traditions visible in the burial rite: the bodies were laid extended on their backs; among the grave inventory adornments made by deer's teeth (grandels) and microlithic flint tools including Vielle type points were quite common; during Hamangia I-II phases<sup>3</sup> the presence of whole vessels in the graves was an exception. These features have closest similarities with the early burials of the Mariupol type (see Телегин 1991, 7-17).

The Hamangia people first settled the northern part of Dobrogea. Around the same time the areas south and west of Dobrogea were gradually settled by people of the Usoe, Karanovo III-IV and Hotnitsa cultures. These people were successors of the Early Neolithic population of the Karanovo I-II-Starčevo-Criș cultures which belonged to the Mediterranean racial type (with shorter and more gracile bodies) (Boev 1972, 89-90).

These two groups (we'll call them in short "Hamangians" and "Mediterraneans") had different cultural traditions and these differences are most clearly visible archaeologically in the burial rite. The "Mediterranean" tradition was to bury the dead in contracted position – on the left or on the right side, rarely on the back, while the "Hamangians" were buried extended on their backs. Due to this difference the infiltration of "Mediterraneans" in the Hamangia settlements can be traced (fig. 1). This process is most noticeable in the Durankulak cemetery (the southernmost site known of the first two phases of the Hamangia culture).

The available data (both archaeological and anthropological) show that between these two communities relations were established mainly on the basis of exogamous marriages (Бояджиев 2006, 44-48; Boyadziev in print). The contacts were stable, intensive and peaceful. Evidence of this is the gradual increasing of "Mediterranean" women (from about 15% during phases I-II to 53% in phase III – fig. 2) and the constant presence of foreign men (fig. 3), as well as the first burials of children in contracted position – probably children from "mixed" marriages. The "foreigners" were buried according to their burial rite as the percentage of "foreign" graves containing inventory during Hamangia I-II is smaller than those of the "Hamangians" – 51,5% against 64%. There are differences in the grave goods. In the "Hamangian" burials skulls of herbivorous animals and adornments prevail while the "Mediterraneans" were usually accompanied by vessels – whole or fragmentized. During Hamangia III phase stronger symbiosis between the "foreigners" and the "local people" is attested. The presence of grave goods was equalized – in 80% of the extended burials and 79,17% of the contracted ones. More often the grave inventory of the "foreigners" included typical of the "Hamangians" goods (skulls of herbivorous animals and "grandel" beads). At the

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<sup>2</sup> The multiform character of the Hamangian population and the considerable presence of the Mediterranean type (Nekrasov et al. 1990) is discussed below.

<sup>3</sup> In the paper the periodization of the Hamangia culture proposed by H. Todorova (Todorova 1986, 116) is used (the culture is divided into four phases). About other periodizations see also T. Dimov (Димов 1992, 129-130) and P. Hașotti (Hașotti 1997, 19-22).

same time the placing of whole vessels in graves increases, again mainly in burials in contracted position<sup>4</sup>.

During its III phase the Hamangia culture spread to the south (to Kaliakra cape – see Димов 1992, 23-26), in close proximity to its neighbors. This led to two contrary processes. On one hand the contacts with the neighbors increased – both as direct “inflow” of people (mainly women) and as cultural influences. In the end of the phase more than half of the women in Durankulak were “Mediterraneans”; in Cernavoda almost half of the analyzed skeletons were “Mediterraneans” (Necrasov et al. 1990, 185). It seems that the “foreigners” had equal rights with the “Hamangians” and thus imposed some of their own rites.

On the other hand the spread of the Hamangia people into the whole uninhabited part of Dobrogea made impossible further peaceful expansion and provided grounds for conflicts with their neighbors.

### **Second stage: 4600-4400 cal. BC.**

The stage includes the end of Hamangia (IV phase) and the beginning of the Varna culture. The continuing expansion of the “Hamangians” was, as it seems, accompanied by armed conflicts. There are a number of evidences for this:

- The decreasing percentage of male burials in Durankulak accompanied by increasing number of cenotaphs.
- All male burials belong to Juvenilis and Adultus; only one man reached Maturus age (during Hamangia I-III phases 22% of the buried men were Maturus) (fig. 4).
- Antler battle axes appeared in the graves (in Durankulak and Varna II cemeteries). In Durankulak they are attested in 1/3 of the male burials and 1/2 of the cenotaphs from the Hamangia IV-Varna I phases (fig. 4).
- The first fortifications around Hamangian settlements appeared – Provadiya-Solnitsata (Николов 2008), Dolapkulak (Димов 1992, 26). Most of the tells excavated in Northeastern Bulgaria were also fortified – Golyamo Delchevo, Polyanitsa, Ovcharovo, Targovishte, Radingrad (Todorova 1982)<sup>5</sup>.
- The “Hamangians” abandoned their traditional house constructions and started building massive houses with stone walls, sometimes over 0,50-0,60 m thick in their lower parts (Durankulak, Provadiya, Suvorovo –

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<sup>4</sup> About the burials from the Durankulak cemetery see Todorova et al. 2002. In the current paper the anthropological defining of the sex is used. We think that the so-called “anthropological defining” used in the publication of the Durankulak cemetery (Todorova 2002; Todorova et al. 2002) is not applicable for the Hamangia culture because it is based on data from a different culture – the Varna one.

<sup>5</sup> These fortifications were probably provoked not only by the expansion of the Hamangia culture but also by penetration of the Vadastra and Boian cultures south of the Danube as well as by possible growth of the local population. However, the analysis of the processes in the areas west of Dobrogea is beyond the scope of this article.

Boyadžiev 2004; Петрова 2008). These buildings could have been used as small fortifications in case of danger.

- In the entirely excavated tells in Northeastern Bulgaria a concentration of burnt layers is attested in this period, followed by their temporary or permanent abandonment (Тодорова 1986, 222) – fig. 5.

As a result of these conflicts around 4600-4500 BC the “Hamangians” invaded territories previously inhabited by “Mediterraneans” – like the area around the Varna lakes to Provadiya in southwestern direction.

As a consequence of the peaceful contacts in the earlier period and the forced “incorporation” of people in the middle of the V millennium BC rapid integration processes took place in Southern Dobrogea. They are clearly visible in the Durankulak cemetery. There considerable changes in all elements of the burial rite during Hamangia IV phase have been attested (Boyadžiev 2008).

The analysis of these changes shows the influence of two main factors – the traditions of the “Hamangians” on one hand: the preservation of the extended position in the male and some female burials, the North-South orientation of the bodies (although the idea determining it had probably changed), the numerous adornments accompanying the bodies; and the “Mediterranean” traditions on the other hand: the contracted position of the female burials, the placing of whole vessels in the grave, regulated place of the grave goods. The mixing of these different ethnocultural traditions (unevenly represented in both sexes) led to gradual establishment of sex-based differentiation in some elements of the burial rite (position of the body, some stone structures, some elements of the grave inventory) accompanied by a standardization of the rite. At the same time a strong aspiration for ethnocultural self-identification and differentiation from the neighbor cultures is visible. It is worth noting that for the female burials the contracted on the right side position was accepted (mainly strongly contracted) but not the more popular before (and more popular in the neighbor cultures, too) contracted on the left side one (fig. 6). Another difference from the neighbors was the position of vessels in the graves – mainly around the head and the chest and not on the abdomen and legs. A difference is also visible in the weapons used. While in the neighbor cultures stone hammer-axes were dominant, the “Hamangians” used antler ones (stone battle axes are absent both in the cemeteries and settlements of Hamangia and Varna I cultures).

The process of integration led to the formation of the Varna culture around 4500 BC. It spread over a relatively narrow area along the Black sea coast. During the first phase of the culture the changes that had started in Hamangia IV were completed. The Varna I phase in the cemetery of Durankulak is characterized by the total dominance of the local burial rite (male burials in extended position and female ones contracted on the right side; orientation of the body; type and position of the grave goods; etc.). The absence of differing burials can be explained by two reasons – either the access of foreigners to the village was stopped or they were buried not according to their own tradition but to the local one. However, both possibilities are evidences of one trend – attempt for consolidation of the local

community and differentiation from the neighbor cultures. Probably this was provoked by the on-going conflicts between them.

### **Third stage: 4400-4200 cal. BC.**

In the inner part of Dobrogea a relatively peaceful period began. This is attested during phases II and III of the Varna culture in Durankulak. The buildings became less massive than those from the previous period<sup>6</sup>. The average life duration of men increased and individuals older than 40 years have been found in the cemetery (13,27% of the men are Maturus and there is one Senilis). On the other hand the percentage of male burials with battle axes decreased (fig. 4) as well as the number of cenotaphs (which now lack battle axes). The presence of a large number of “foreigners” is also noticeable. In this period it was not only due to patrilocal marriages but to a variety of contacts, including settling of “foreign communities” (attested by groups of burials with different than the local rite but almost equal males/females proportion and a presence of children). The origin of the foreigners is also varied – other regions of the Varna culture (probably the area of the Varna lakes), the Kodzadermen culture area and possibly the territories north of the Danube River (Бояджиев 2006, 19-22, 47-49).

The conflicts lasted longer in the “border areas”. Indication of this is the situation in the Varna I cemetery. The death-rate of the grown-up men there is highest between 20 and 25 years and gradually decreases in number with increasing the age (fig. 7). The cenotaphs are about 14% and the burials with battle axes are about 21% of all excavated graves. The battle axes are more varied than those in Durankulak, but the stone ones are rare. Copper and antler shaft-hole axes are dominant<sup>7</sup>. High concentration of battle axes (of copper and antler) is also visible in the Devnya cemetery. In this period new weapons appeared – like copper battle axes and heavy copper spearheads probably used in close combat (the latest are found in graves 43 and 97 of the Varna I cemetery and the case finding from Varna known as “Second grave 43” – Димитров 2007, 56). As it seems the weapons and especially the battle axes became also symbols of power and high social status which suggests a change in the social structure reflecting the increasing influence of the warriors.

It is namely this “border area” of the Hamangia culture where the desire to retain the tribal traditions is most expressed. The man from the Varna II cemetery (Hamangia IV culture) had a necklace made of imitations of “grandels” (in Durankulak “grandels” were used in phases I-III of the Hamangia culture but disappeared during Hamangia IV). Both in Varna II and Varna I cemeteries (the

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<sup>6</sup> Although there are other possible explanations for this – more difficult access to the stone material or improved building skills and attempt to save materials and labor (see Boyadziev 2004, 10-11).

<sup>7</sup> The authors would like to thank V. Slavchev (Archaeological Museum – Varna) for the opportunity to work with the documentation of the excavations and unpublished finds from the Varna I cemetery.

latter belonging to the Varna culture) the Hamangian tradition to bury some of the women in extended on the back position was preserved, often with grave goods typical of the men – including battle axes in a few cases. It seems that those representatives (and successors) of the Hamangia culture who were in closest contact (and probably armed conflicts) with their neighbors, were the ones that most “jealously” tried to retain their traditions.

At the same time in both Varna I and Devnya cemeteries burials are present that should be connected with people from the Kodzadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI area (Бояджиев 2006, 26-30; 48-49). The anthropological data clearly show the continuing process of mixing of the two ethnocultural components – northern (“Hamangians”) and southern one (“Mediterraneans”). On one hand a kinship tie between the “Hamangians” and the representatives of the Varna culture has been recorded. According to the anthropological analysis the man buried in grave 43 of Varna I cemetery (Varna culture) and the one from grave 3 of Varna II cemetery (Hamangia IV culture) belonged to the same tribal group (Йорданов 1980, 19-20). On the other hand in Durankulak the height of people from the Varna culture period was 0,04 m lower than that of the “Hamangians (Yordanov, Dimitrova 2002, 325, 330) – a change which can be explained by mixing with the shorter and more gracile “Mediterraneans”.

#### **Fourth stage: 4200-4100 cal. BC.**

The development of the Varna culture ended abruptly. It is suggested that it was destroyed by people coming from the North-Pontic steppes (Тодорова 1986, 223-224). Several findings have been pointed out as evidences of this process: the graves from Reka Devnya and Kyulevcha, the zoomorphic scepters from Suvorovo, Casimcea, Salcuța, Drama, etc. (Тодорова 1986, 224). New arguments supporting this hypothesis have been found in Durankulak. In the cemetery 9 burials (№№ 12, 24, 119, 128, 162, 164, 166, 181, 190) were excavated which clearly differ from those of Hamangia and Varna cultures but have close similarities with burials from the Sredni Stog II cultural area (Novo Danilovka type – see Telegin 1988, 78). In only one of them (grave 181) grave inventory was found – a fragmentized large storage vessel supported by few stones in its base<sup>8</sup>. The vessel is typical of the Varna culture. However in the graves belonging to this culture only miniature models of these pots were placed but never the real ones. The presence of the vessel in question in grave 181 shows that these burials were made either during the Varna culture or right after its end. In the tell at Durankulak pits destroying the last Chalcolithic building level have been attested<sup>9</sup>. The available data provide ground to suggest that the tell was inhabited for a short time

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<sup>8</sup> Personal observations of Y. Boyadziev who excavated the grave in 1981. In the publication of the cemetery it is suggested that the vessel belonged to a destroyed grave from the Varna culture (Todorova et al. 2002, 93).

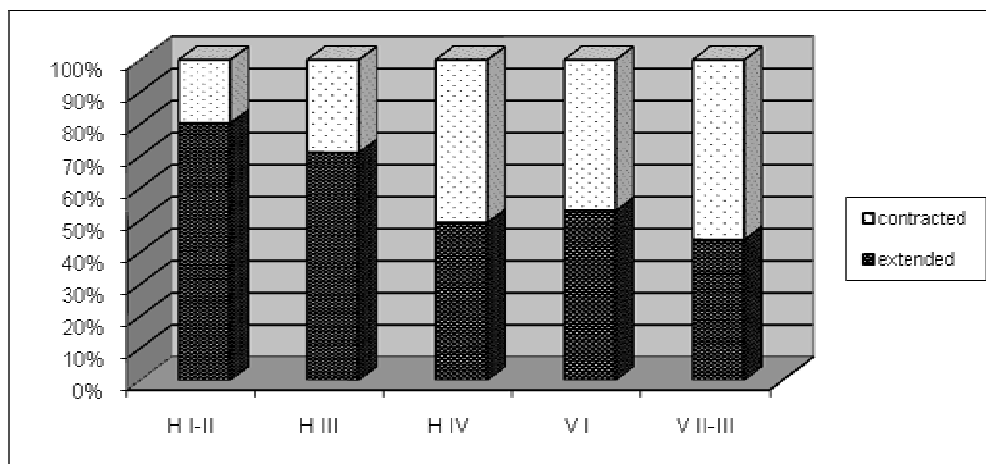
<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately this building level (as well as the possible layer over it) were largely destroyed by the Medieval settlement, thus it is difficult to determine the exact stratigraphic position of these pits.

by people belonging to the Sredni Stog II cultural area. It is quite possible that they were the ones who caused the end of the last settlement of the Varna culture.

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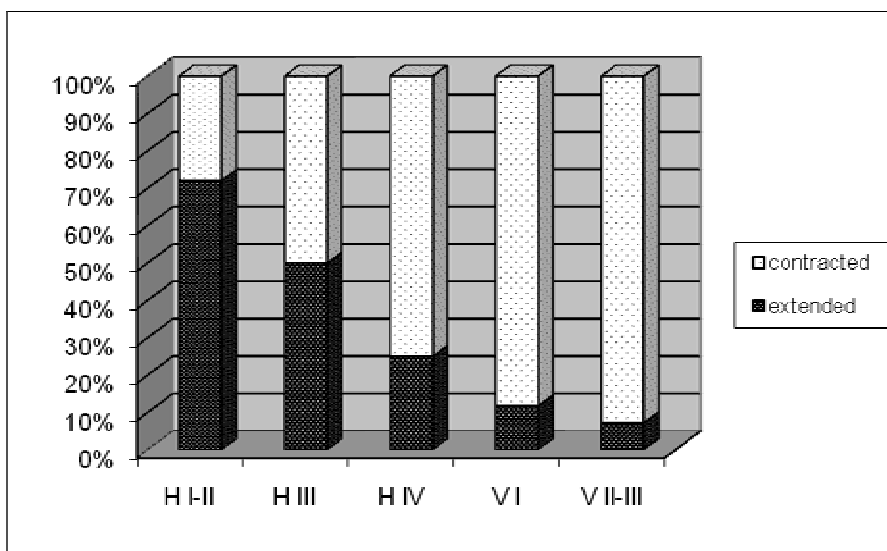
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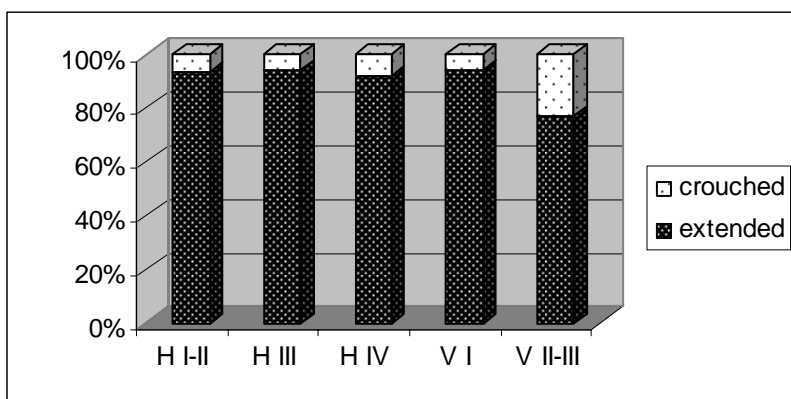


**Fig. 1:** Proportion between contracted and extended position in the Durankulak cemetery during the phases of Hamangia (H) and Varna (V) cultures.

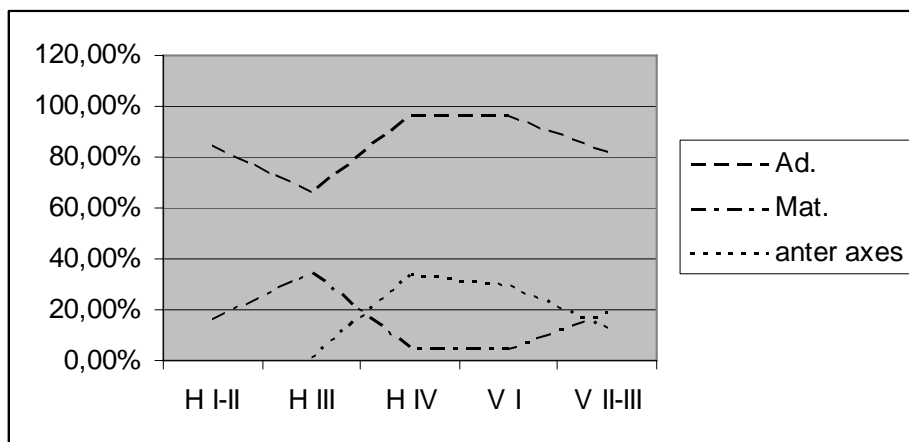




**Fig. 2:** Proportion between contracted and extended position in the female burials in the Durankulak cemetery during the phases of Hamangia (H) and Varna (V) cultures.



**Fig. 3:** Proportion between contracted and extended position in the male burials in the Durankulak cemetery during the phases of Hamangia (H) and Varna (V) cultures.



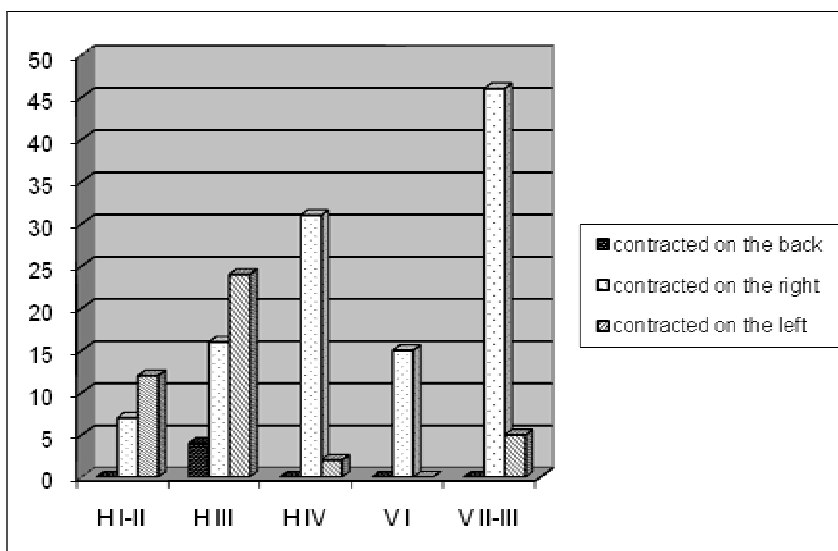
**Fig. 4:** Age-distribution of male burials in Durankulak compared with the percentage of antler battle axes in them.

	Sava	G. Delchevo	Polyanitsa	Targovishte	Ovcharovo	Radingrad
III Late Chalco- lithic II I		XVII				
		XIV-XVI			XI-XIII	
	VI-VII	V-XIII			hiatus	VI
	V	hiatus	VIII	IV	VIII-X	V
Middle Chalcolithic	IV	IV	V-VII	I-III	VII	III
	III	III			V-VI	II
Early Chalcolithic	hiatus	II	I-IV		I-IV	I
	I-II					

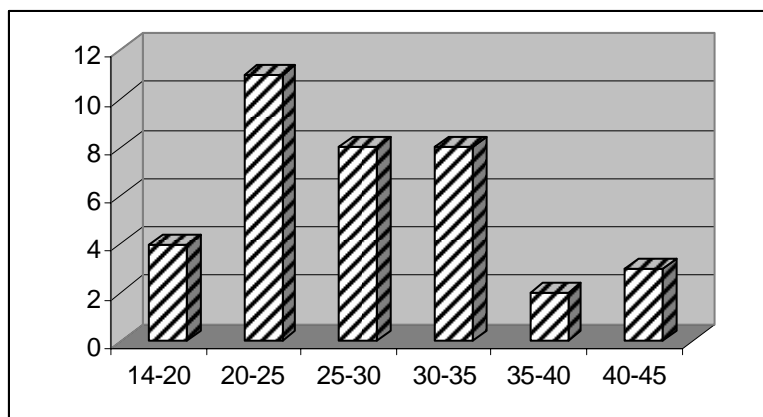
  

	- burnt building level		- partially burnt building level
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**Fig. 5:** Stratigraphic sequence of tells in Northeastern Bulgaria with distribution of burnt building levels.



**Fig. 6:** Proportion between the types of contracted position (on the right side, on the left side and on the back) in the female burials in the Durankulak cemetery during the phases of Hamangia (H) and Varna (V) cultures.



**Fig. 7:** Age-distribution of male burials in Varna I cemetery.

