

ON RESEARCH PROBLEMS OF BIRITUAL CEMETERIES FROM TRANSYLVANIA (7TH-9TH CENTURY)

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Abstract

Problems related to this type of cemeteries are complex and lie firstly on the fact that the shallowness/small depth where the cremation graves were located led to their partial or total demise mainly due to agricultural labors. Moreover, a large number of them have not been thoroughly archaeologically researched due to various reasons. Another problem is their not being published or their superficial mentioning. We will proceed by summarising a short history of research made on this type of burial sites.

Key words: Transylvania, biritual cemeteries, cremation cemeteries, funerary rite, the Mediaș group.

Both funerary rites of inhumation and cremation were commonly used throughout the 7th up to the 9th centuries in Transylvania. The contemporary use of both rites in the same burial sites formed the biritual cemeteries (fig. 1). Cremation is the constant in all of this type of cemeteries in Transylvania (fig. 2). The biritual aspect of these cemeteries can be deduced from the fact that the inhumation graves are spread out amongst the cremation graves, not being in any way separated from them. In cases where inventory items have also been found (offering pots, knives, flint steels, different types of earrings, rings, beads) they have proved the fact that the cremation graves have coexisted with the inhumation graves. One example will be the burial site Boarta în 7A inhumation tomb an offering pot was discovered which was identical with the type of pots that were used as urns in the cremation graves¹. Another example is the cemetery of Bratei where Avar bronze cast belt ornaments have been found in two inhumation graves but also in the burial pits of two cremation graves².

Problems related to this type of cemeteries are complex and lie firstly on the fact that the shallowness/small depth where the cremation graves were located led to their partial or total demise mainly due to agricultural labors. Moreover, a large number of them have not been thoroughly archaeologically researched due to various reasons. Another problem is their not being published or their superficial mentioning. We will proceed by summarising a short history of research made on this type of burial sites.

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¹ Dumitrașcu-Togan 1974, p. 104.

² Zaharia 1977, p. 88.

In 1960 in Mediaş³ a biritual cemetery was identified, in which cremation was mostly encountered. The cemetery is located on the eastern boundry of the town about 100 m off the Mediaş-Dîrlos highway, being situated on the *Dealul Furcilor* slope. It was discovered accidentally while people were trying to level up the soil in order to make room for land terraces amongst city constructions..The workers noticed a number of pots that were filled with burnt bones and ashes. During the salvage archaeological digs of 1960, 10 tombs have been discovered. In the following year another 7 came to light. Out of the total of 17 tombs three are of inhumation and the rest of 14 are of cremation⁴. The cemetery of Mediaş was quite a novelty in 1960 and it was the first discovery of this type in Transylvania K. Horedt added this cemetery and the following findings of this type to a new cultural group which he decided to call the *Mediaş*⁵ group. Based upon the archaeological material found which consists of burial urns decorated with horizontal, straight or paralel and wavy lines and also on the small number of items of inventory and making analogies, the discoverer of the burial site dated the cemetery around the 9th-10th century⁶, and then based upon the following finds he dated the cemetery towards the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th.

In the spring of 1961 at Ocna Sibiului⁷, on the plateau called *Lab*, by the locals a similar cemetery to that of Mediaş was discovered. The actual research of the burial site was made in a series of digs between 1962 and 1965, 136 graves having been discovered in total out of which 120 of cremation and 15 of inhumation but also a Schythic grave⁸. Until the complete publishing of the burial site in 2005 only the artefacts discovered in the first dig were known, artefacts which came from 18 cremation graves and one of inhumation⁹. The one who discovered the burial site dates it in the 8th to the 9th century¹⁰.

Between 1964 and 1967 in Bratei¹¹ another biritual cemetery called *Cemetery nr. 2 din* has been researched out of which 244 tombs have been uncovered, 210 of which cremation graves and 34 burial graves, dating the burial site in the 7th to the 8th century. Although it is a bit different from the other *Mediaş type*, burial sites, most of the researchers consider this burial site as part of this group¹².

Between 1965-1968 at Boarta¹³ on the site called *Şoivani*, a biritual site was discovered out of which 35 graves have been uncovered, 2 of which of inhumation and 33 of which of cremation. Besides the urns decorated with straight paralel horizontal and wavy lines small knife blades and two loop rings have also been found. Based upon the burial rite and on the inventory the cemetery belongs to the *Mediaş type* cemeteries. This cemetery can be chronologically placed after the Slav tumulus cemeteries from Someşeni and Nuşfalău, and is contemporary to the ones from Mediaş and Ocna Sibiului, and earlier than Blandiana A¹⁴.

Between 1966-1970 at Guşteriţa¹⁵ in the site called *Fântâna Rece* a biritual cemetery was dug, uncovering 80 graves 79 of which of cremation and one of inhumation. The cemetery belongs to the *Mediaş type* and dates from the 8th to the 9th century.

At Târnava, in the digging point called *Palamor*, another biritual burial site has been discovered. Some researchers argue that there are 36 graves in total 5 of which of inhumation and 31 of cremation¹⁶, while others support the fact that that there are 58 graves in total, 2

³ Horedt 1965, p. 7-23.

⁴ Horedt 1965, p. 8.

⁵ Horedt 1965, p. 13.

⁶ Horedt 1965, p. 13.

⁷ Protase 1965, p. 153-159.

⁸ Protase 2005, p. 7; Nicolaescu-Plopşor-Wolski 1975, p. 165.

⁹ Protase 1965, p. 153.

¹⁰ Protase 1965, p. 156-157; Protase 2005, p. 63.

¹¹ Zaharia 1977.

¹² Horedt 1965, p. 13; Horedt 1986, p. 64.

¹³ Dumitraşcu-Togan 1974, p. 93-109.

¹⁴ Dumitraşcu-Togan 1974, p. 105.

¹⁵ Năgler 1971, p. 63-73.

¹⁶ Velter 2002, p. 450.

of which of inhumation and the rest incineration graves¹⁷. In the fall of 1972 and spring of 1973, fragments of 19 cremation urns have been gathered from the already plowed land. In 1974 a probing dig was made, that resulted in 32 graves 2 of which of inhumation and the rest of 30 of cremation. In 1975 during agricultural labours some other 6 urns have been discovered and in 1977 the last cremation grave was noted¹⁸. The cemetery dates from the 8th to the 9th century as well.

During the clay for bricks extracting process, in 1961 to 1962 remains of human skeletons have been discovered at Ghirbom, in the *Gruul Fierului* digging point. From 1974 to 1975, seven inhumation graves have been discovered¹⁹. In 1995 the diggings restarted and 11 cremation graves and two inhumation graves were uncovered²⁰. In this way 20 graves have been found, 11 of which of cremation and 8 of inhumation (one is from the roman period). Based upon the inventory discovered and on the analogies made the cemetery belongs to the *Medias* type dating from the 7th to the 9th centuries.

Another biritual cemetery belonging to the *Medias* group was researched at Beghin²¹ in the *În Peri or Zăcătoare* digging point. The first cremation graves came to light in 1971. The archaeological diggings made between 1977-1979 and then continued in 1991 and in 1993 to 1994 lead to the finding of 360 graves only 12 of which of inhumation²². Although this is the biggest cemetery of this type in Transylvania the documentation regarding the findings, has not been published yet. The burial site dates from the 7th to 9th centuries.

Some researchers include this category of biritual cemeteries other funerary findings like those of Turdaş, Sâncel, Petrisat, Alba Iulia, Ciunga²³ or Săcuieni²⁴. Mircea Rusu²⁵ includes almost all cemeteries from the Medias group in this category. These being said, we consider there is more to be mentioned regarding these as well.

In 1964 at Săcuieni²⁶ an inhumation grave was discovered that had an offering pot deposited along. Kurt Horedt²⁷ argues that this is a biritual grave because it consists of a skeleton and an cremation urn.

Between 1969 and 1971 at Turdaş²⁸ in the *Valea Clocita* digging point 18 incineration graves have been uncovered. The remains of burnt bones and coal were deposited either within the urn or directly in the grave pit.

In 1978 at about 1 km from the village of Petrisat²⁹ ceramic fragments and traces of burnt bones coming from what was probably a cremation cemetery have been found.

In 1980 at Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare*³⁰, during digs 3 cremation urns dating from the first half of the 8th century have been found.

From what resulted out of the findings made these later mentioned cemeteries are not biritual but only cremation cemeteries, taking the burial grave from Săcuieni out of consideration. This being said, taking the nowadays stage of research into consideration we can only talk about 8 biritual cemeteries on Transylvania, in all of which the cremation rite being the main. Naturally we cannot exclude the possibility that upcoming research in these cemeteries might render an additional number of inhumation graves that are contemporary to the cremation ones.

¹⁷ Blăjan-Botezatu 2000, p. 456.

¹⁸ Blăjan-Botezatu 2000, p. 456-457.

¹⁹ Aldea-Stoicovici-Blăjan 1980, p. 151-175.

²⁰ Anghel 1997, p. 255-271.

²¹ Aldea-Stoicovici-Blăjan 1980, p. 151.

²² Blăjan-Botezatu 2000, p. 457.

²³ Blăjan-Botezatu 2000, p. 453-457.

²⁴ Horedt 1976, p. 49.

²⁵ Rusu 1977, p. 205-206.

²⁶ Chidioșan-Nanassy 1968, p. 517-520.

²⁷ Horedt 1976, p. 49.

²⁸ Hica-Blăjan 1973, p. 641-652.

²⁹ Blăjan-Botezatu 2000, p. 457.

³⁰ Blăjan-Botezatu 2000, p. 457.

These confusions, or better said, these inclusions in the category of biritual cemeteries of cremation cemeteries is also probably due to the fact that they belong to the same cultural group defined by Kurt Horedt as the *Mediaș group*³¹. The fact that they have always been dealt with altogether without making a clear distinction between the two types also contributed to this. Even if the inventory of these two types of cemeteries is almost identical we cannot omit the fact that within the biritual cemeteries both burial rites have been used. This is the reason why we consider that a more careful and accurate usage of terms and specifications such as biritual cemeteries of Mediaș type and cremation cemeteries of Mediaș type is necessary.

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³¹ Horedt 1965, p. 13.

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Fig. 1 Map of biritual cemeteries from Transylvania (● Certain cemeteries: 1 Berghin; 2 Boarta; 3 Bratei; 4 Ghirbom; 5 Gușterița; 6 Mediaș; 7 Ocna Sibiului; 8 Târnava; ■ Cemeteries considered as biritual: 1 Alba Iulia; 2 Ciunga; 3 Petrisat; 4 Săcuieni; 5 Sâncel; 6 Turdaș.)

Fig. 2 The ratio between cremation and inhumation graves

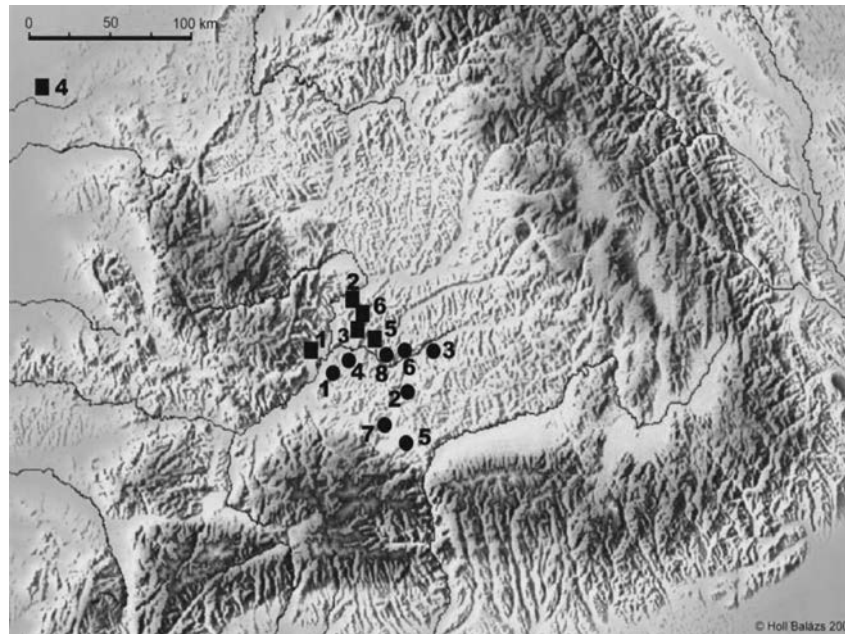


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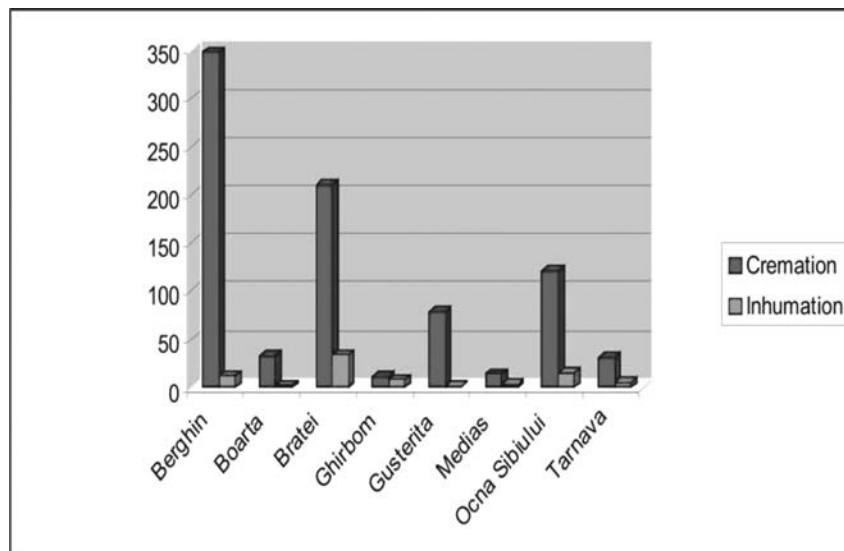


Fig. 2 The ratio between cremation and inhumation graves