

THE CEMETERY FROM OBÂRȘIA NOUĂ THE LAST ARCHAEOLOGICAL CAMPAIGNS¹

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Abstract. *The article presents the unpublished results of the last systematical archaeological research carried out in the biritual medieval cemetery from Obârșia Nouă (Olt county). In the following material you will find a presentation of the 25 tombs discovered in the campaigns in 1973, 1974, 1976 and 1977 years.*

Keywords: *medieval, necropolis, biritual, inventory, unpublished.*

The cemetery from Obârșia Nouă (Olt county) is seated on the Southern top terrace of the valley called by the locals "Balta". At a distance of 200 meters South-East from the school, in the center of actual village, six interments were discovered by chance.

In October 1968, by the initiative of the Corabia Museum, preservation diggings were made and another four interments were discovered (Toropu, Stoica 1969, 570-577).

The archaeological researches between 1968-1971 led to the discovery of 105 tombs, dated in the VIII-IXth centuries, from which 95 were interments and 10 were cremation tombs. The borders of the cemetery were also established in the North and the East, the West border of the necropolis being still uncertain (Toropu, Stoica 1972, 163-188).

The diggings in the necropolis were continued between the years 1972 - 1977. The researches of the cemetery encountered hardships due to the fact that a part of the tombs were placed in the yards of the villagers, and another part of the tombs were very close to the highway. When the study called *Romanitatea târzie și străromânii în Dacia traiană sud-carpatică (secolele III-XI)* was published, the number of the tombs was reaching 122, from which 111 were interments and 11 were cremation tombs (Toropu 1976). During 1976, the last five interments are researched, the total number of tombs reaching 169. The archaeological diggings from the Obârșia Nouă biritual necropolis ended in the year 1977 (O. Stoica, *manuscript*).

The object of the present study is a presentation of 16 interments and nine cremation tombs discovered in the course of the years 1973, 1974, 1976 and 1977. By using the materials from the History Museum of Corabia and the site logs signed by professor Onoriu Stoica, we are trying to obtain a complete image of the biritual necropolis from Obârșia Nouă.

Abbreviations: T = tomb, S = section, □ = square, D. = depth, L. = length, w. = width, Fig. = figure.

T124 interment (1973, S36, □1) – D. from -0.40 m to -2.40 m. The pit is straight, with rounded corners; L. = 2.25 m and w. = 0.54 m. In the filling were discovered fragments of coal and rotten wood, and the coffin was intact only on the Southern edge of the pit. The skeleton has the length of 1.75 m and is oriented towards W-E. The buried is an adult, probably male, is in supine decubitus, with his arms and feet tensed. His feet are leaned to right. His skull is broken. Inventory: close to the right ear one simple Bronze fragmentary ear-ring, in the left and the right of the shoulder, under the skeleton, into a hole, there were found green beads made of a glassy paste from which 4 strangled beads (one bead with 5 segments, one bead with 4 segments and another bead with 2 segments) and four beads with oval-flat form.

T125 interment (1973, S36, □3) - D. from -0.20 m to -2.55 m, L. = 2.44 m, w. head = 0.98 m and at the feet is 0.86 m. The shape is rectangular, with right corners and rounded edges, and the bottom is with right shape. In two small round pits find at the extremities, with the diameter of 13 cm, were fragments of rotten wood were discovered. The buried, probably a male, had a coffin, the edge of the coffin was marked with a Violet stripe, which can be seen even under the skeleton. The skeleton has the length of 1.83 m. It is oriented towards W-E and it lies in supine decubitus, with the head towards left. The position of the arms: left hand is tensed, the palm on the belly, and the right arm is parallel with the body. Inventory: under the thorax small pieces of coal, under the right knee a goat head.

The interment was found under the cremated T128.

T126 interment (1973, S36, □9) - a child 7-8 years old. D. from -0.50 m to -1.50 m. The pit is rectangular, with right shape corners, and has L. = 1.38 m; the pit is wider at the head -0.53 m (at the feet the pit has w. = 0.50 m); the bottom of the tomb has regular shape. The skeleton is oriented towards W-E, and has the length of 1.05 m; it lies in supine decubitus, the left arm is parallel with the body, easily bent from the elbow. The feet are tensed, with the tibias and fibulas closed to each other. The skull slightly leaned on the back, with the sight up; a piece from the lower jaw was kept and also some teeth, a part of the skullcap. From the left arm was kept the humerus, the radius, the cubitus and a part from the palm, one fragment from the right phalanx of the foot. Nothing kept from the basin. Inventory: in the left part, close to the palm, one fragmentary iron knife.

T127 interment (1973, S36, □2) – a child 4 years old. The tomb as not noticed and it was partially destroyed during the excavations; it lies at -0.80 m from the actual level. It is oriented towards W-E, it has no inventory.

¹ Thanks to Onoriu Stoica

T128 cremation (1973, S36, □2) - the cremation urn grave lies above the interment T125. The pit was not noticed. The urn is a jar, gray species, with polished decoration. The bowl is broken, it has the upper side thick and bended over; no fragments of the lower side of the vessel were found. Outside the urn, in the same pit, were found small fragments of bones and coal and fragments of a supply boat (?).

T129 cremation (1973, S37, □5) - cremation, in the urn and the grave also. D. = -0.27 m, L. = 1.00 m, w. = 0.47 m. In the pit can be noticed pigments of burned ground brought from the pyre, and a piece of wood.

T130 cremation (1973, S37, □8) - cremation in the urn and the grave also. It was placed on the surface and was partially destroyed by the plow. From the urn only the lower part was kept. The tomb dimensions are: D. from -0.20 m to -0.38 m, L. = 1.10 m, w. = 0.55 m. Inventory: one forged iron knife, with the tip up.

T131 cremation (1973, S 37) - cremation in the urn and the grave also. It was also destroyed by the agricultural works; D. from -0.17 m to -0.25m. Inventory: one strangled bead with 9 segments, opaque, blue made from glassy paste and one globular bead, ceramics fragments, one Bronze ear-ring and one iron knife with the length of 13 cm.

T132 cremation (1973, S37) - urn cremation. The tomb was partially destroyed, only few fragments of Dridu ceramics were kept, probably from the urn.

T133 cremation (1973, S37)- the pit starts from -0.47 m.

T134 interment? (1973, S37) - inventory: one white shell, one Bronze ear-ring, one Copper ear-ring, one piece of silex, 3 Iron knives, one piece of iron tin, glassy paste beads (Fig. 1), of different colors.

T135 interment (1973, S37) - the tomb has an elongated shape, with rounded edges. The dimensions of the pit: D. = -1.68 m, L. = 1.83 m, w. head 0.57 m, w. feet 0.37 m. The tomb was sectioned by a cottage, but the skeleton is well preserved. We can notice that the skeleton belongs to an adult, with a humpback.

T136 interment (1973, S38) - the tomb has a rectangular shape with "fins". It has beams, under the upper beam we can notice remains of rotten wood. We are not able to appreciate where the pit begins, but it ends at the depth of -2.28 m; L. = 1.55 m, w. head = 0.70 m, w. feet = 0.60 m. In the pit can be noticed traces of rotten wood, ashes and coal. Inventory: in the neck area - 90 beads of pearls, one strangled with 3 segments, 3 strangled with 2 segments; at the head - one silver ear-ring with chain-shape hangers. The second silver ear-ring is placed on the belly, and it may be carried in that area by a small animal. At the feet of the skeleton there is one pot oriented with its mouth towards the N-E; close to the pot can be observed few pieces of wood and traces of ash.

T137 interment (1974, S39, □3) - D. from -0.45 m to -2.05m. L. = 2.07 m, w. head = 0.50 m, w. feet = 0.60 m. The skeleton belongs to a mature person with the length of 1.65m. It is oriented towards W-E. Traces of the coffin can be noticed. In the pit, close to the left foot, fragments of coal.

T138 interment (1974, S39, □4) - the pit starts at the D. = -0.40 m. The skeleton is oriented towards E-W and has the length of 1.57 m. Inventory: near the right thigh-bone one knife with wooden sheath; in the same place, close to the knife, three pieces of silex, one fragment of sandstone for sharpening; one ring or ear-ring made from Bronze wire, round in section, which has one wire half twisted; one wire pendant with grape shape.

T139 cremation (1974, S40, □10) - the cremation remains can be found in a broken urn due to the ground pressure. The urn was oriented towards the South. The cremation took place somewhere else.

T140 cremation (1974, S40, □2-3) - D. from -0.25 m to -0.55m. In the filling of the tomb, fragments of coal.

T141 interment (1974, S 41) - due to its difficult position (under a fence and a mulberry tree) only partially excavated. The tomb contained a coffin. In the filling of the tomb, fragments of coal.

T142 interment (1974, S 41) - had a coffin. In the filling of the tomb, fragments of coal. Inventory: close to the belly, a small fragment of Dridu ceramics.

T143 (1974, S 42) - was not kept.

T144 interment (1974, S 42) - in the filling of the tomb one small fragment of Dridu ceramics, millet (plant) seeds, coal fragments and pieces of wood from the coffin. Inventory: three ear-rings on the left ear and another three on the right ear; in the left hand a ring; between the left forearm and the abdomen one knife and a bone tube filled with needles.

T145 (1974, S 42) - was not kept, but it could be noticed that the pit was starting from the depth of -0.40 m.

T146 interment (1974, S42) - in the filling of the tomb, on the eastern side, one fragment of Dridu ceramics and coal. Inventory: fragments of a ceramic bowl (with site marks - Fig. 2-3) at the left hand one silver chain with double round mail and one ring; at the right hand a piece of iron, under the belly a lot of millet seeds.

T148 interment (1974, S42) - inventory: close to the head animal bones; one ear-ring in the left side of the head; one ring on the belly; in the same area, a bone tube with two needles and one knife with wooden sheath; at the neck we have some beads; at the feet - eggshells.

T165 interment (1976, S52) - the buried had a coffin. D. = -2.06 m, L. = 2.08m, w. = 0.58 m. On the bottom of the tomb was found coal which is also present in the filling of the tomb, with fish and chicken bones. It had rich inventory: beads on the chest; on the right side, close to the chin one ear-ring or chains from the pearls; in the left of the head, two silver ear-rings with the hanger recently broken; on the left side, near the knee, is a piece of a brick. The phalanx from one hand were found in the back of the head, apparently being moved there by a small animals or being deranged by T166, another tomb that was excavated near this one.

T166 interment (1976, S53) - superpose interment T165. In the filling of the tomb were founded pieces of coal. The tomb has six fins. Inventory: one fragmentary bead, the lower side of a bowl, one small ceramic fragment and

one piece of a burned bone; at the feet, two bowls, the bowl from the left having a big animal bone on the top; near the calotte, on both sides of the body, two staples and two iron links; chicken bones. The phalanx from the foot was moved by small animals.

T167 interment (1976) - the pit starts at the depth of -0.65 m. In the filling of the tomb can be noticed pieces of coal and small fragments of ceramics, pieces of wood from the coffin, sheep and pork bones. At the edge of the tomb, close to the feet, were founded coal and ash.

In the last campaign, (August, 1977), 4 sections were drawn, and all of them contained mixed archaeological materials: ceramic fragments dated from the Dacian period, from the Roman period and the Late Medieval period, fragments of Silex, pieces of bricks, animal bones and a Medieval hearth.

A few general remarks regarding the Obârșia Nouă biritual necropolis can be drawn.

The Obârșia Noua necropolis is a biritual necropolis, dating in the VIII-IXth century.

In the necropolis, the main type of tomb is the interment, followed, in small number, by the cremation tomb (from 147 tombs that were studied only 18 of them were cremation tombs). Both burial rituals were used in the same period of time. There were very few cases of tombs that were placed on top of each other, probably because all the tombs were carefully marked and delimited: 3 cremation tombs were affected by an interment (T59 was disturbed by T57, T69 disturbed by T63 and T85 disturbed by T88), one interment (T125) was placed under the urn cremation tomb T128, and another interment (T165) was crossed by the interment T166.

The interments are placed in lines, oriented towards West-East; in the entire necropolis there are only 4 exceptions from this type of alignment: two cases in which the dead was buried towards E-W (T122, T138) and the other two in which the graves are oriented towards WWN-EES (T15), EEN-WWS (T105).

The pits of the graves have rectangular, trapezoidal or elongated shape. Generally, they all have internal structure elements as beams or "fins".

If we consider the classification realized by Oct. Toropu and O. Stoica (Toropu, Stoica 1972, 164-5, fig.3), the pits can be divided in four main categories:

- type 1 (most numerous) - simple, rectangular or trapezoidal shape, with regular or rounded corners;
- type 2 - rectangular or trapezoidal shape, with 4 or 6 "thins";
- type 3 - elongated-oval shape;
- type 4 - rectangular shape, with rounded corners, and inside the pit, on each side, 2 small round pits.

Considering the information we have until now, we can provide the following statistics:

Pit type	Year 1971		Year 1976	
	No. tomb	%	No. tomb	%
type 1	66	79,52	70	76,92
type 2	13	15,66	15	16,48
type 3	3	3,62	4	4,40
type 4	1	1,20	2	2,20
	86 from 105 tombs		91 from 169 tombs	

For types 3 and 4, the number of the tombs does not exceed 5. It is not very clear if types 3 and 4 can be considered classification units or just few exceptions.

The depth of the pits is between -0.40 and -3.04 m. In the pits that were excavated at great depths, there were carved steps in the walls of the pits.

The dead usually lies in supine decubitus (sometimes, with coffin). The tombs contain a single body (with the exception of T82), but the sex of the dead is hard to determine without a complete bones analysis.

In these campaigns we are noted an adult with a humpback and two child burials (30 cases of children burials from 168 tombs).

The tombs offer a various inventory: ceramics, clothes, animal offerings for the gods and personal objects. The most commonly found objects are jewelry: ear-rings, beads, and rings. No weapons were found (excepting 2 arrow tips discovered in the first 2 campaigns, in the cremation tombs T98 and T115).

In the filling of the tombs could be found traces of ash and coal.

The cremation tombs were all discovered at a small depth, and for this reason some of them were partially destroyed by the agricultural works. The bones from the cremation could be found in urn only, or both in the urn and in the tomb.

The inventory, when is not completely missing, is very poorly; there are only few cases when the inventory has few categories, but it is not rich though. For the campaigns that are the subject of this article, we can mention the following: glass beads, an ear-ring de Bronze and two iron knives, one of which passed through fire. Few pieces of coal, brought from the funeral pyre were placed together with the bones, into the urn or in the pit.

Regarding the ethnicity of the buried, we think there is a mix of populations in the necropolis, the only conclusion that can be drawn, considering that the necropolis was not the subject of a thoroughly and methodical Anthropological analysis. It is hard to say that the necropolis belongs to only one ethnic group (the cremation rituals were practiced both by the Romanians and the Slavs, and the burial was practiced by the Christian Romanians and Slavs also).

In the necropolis there were found few elements that can confirm or contradict the fact that the buried were Christian. We are not able to agree, without any doubt, that the orientation of the buried towards East certifies the fact that all of them were Christian, considering the fact that no inventory parts were found to confirm the Christianity of the buried (Rusu).

A significant part of the inventory was delivered to the University of Craiova and will be the subject for a more detailed analysis. The inventory of the necropolis is at the Corabia Museum, Oltenia Museum and National History Museum of Romania.

List of figures:

1. Fig. 1: T134 – beads.
2. Fig. 2-3:T146 - fragments of a ceramic bowl.

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Fig. 1

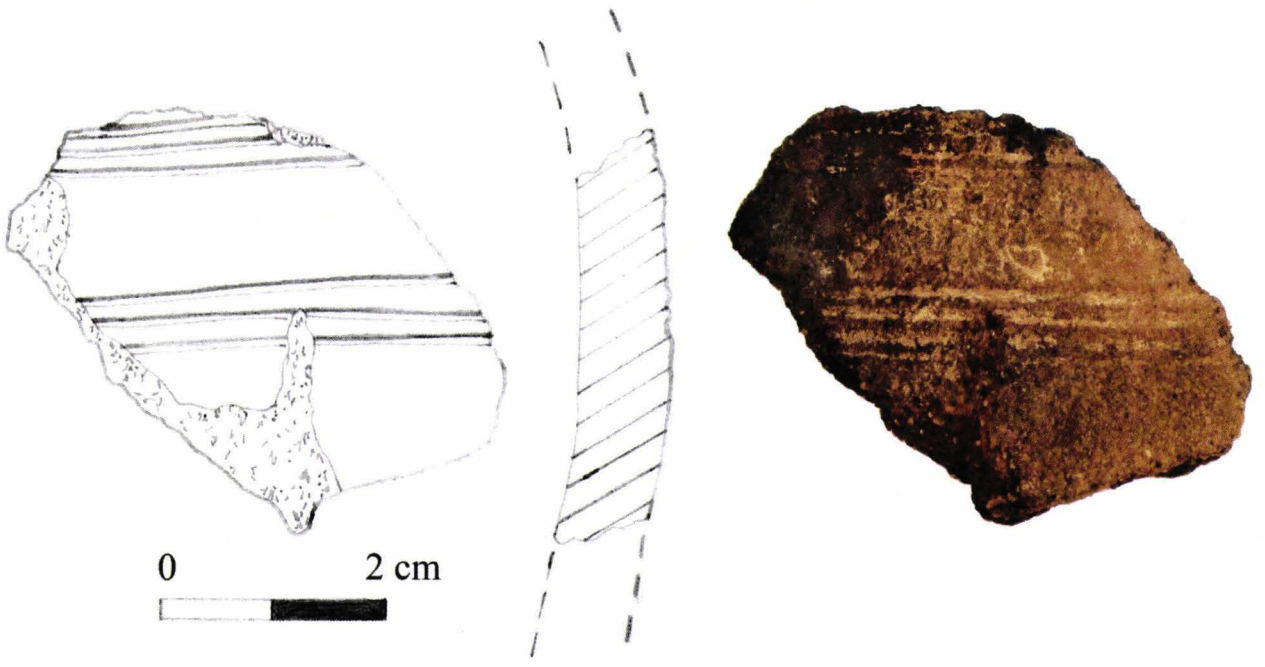


Fig. 2



Fig. 3