

# ON THE EARLY BRONZE AGE BURIAL RITES IN THE BULGARIAN LANDS

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A systematization of the data about the burial rites in the Bulgarian lands during the Early Bronze Age (EBA) (ca. 3500/3400 – 2250/2000 BC) raises some topical problems, discussed in this paper, which concern the relative chronology and cultural belonging of the flat and tumular necropolises and the single nontumular burials, the appearance of different burial practices, the cult of the dead, and the social stratification (according to the data from the burial rites). The following subdivision of the EBA has been adopted: first stage – 3500/3400–3100/3000 BC (EBA I); second stage – 3100/3000–2500/2400 BC (EBA II); third stage – 2500/2400–2250/2000 BC (EBA III) (Nikolova 1992 a; see also Nikolova 1992).

## RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY AND CULTURAL BELONGING

EBA burial rites in the Bulgarian lands include three kinds of burials:

- burials in settlements;
- burials in flat necropolises and single nontumular burials;
- burials under tumuli.

### Burials in settlements

Such burials are characteristic to the Upper Thracian Lowland during the EBA I-III, more specifically Ezero and Yunatsite (Nikolova 1991). All of them are inhumation burials in contracted position. A characteristic feature is the presence of burials not only of adults but also of newborn babies in pits, or in pits and urns. Most of the graves contain no grave goods. In one burial in the Ezero tell (No. 5 after Katincharov) a necklace consisting of a marble pendant and Dentalium beads has been discovered. This is an inhumation burial in supine position with contracted legs, below a dwelling from building horizon XIII. There is no evidence of ochre (Georgiev et al. 1978, p. 493, tabl. 212-213). It is theoretically possible for this burial investigated to have preceded the building of the earliest settlement in the excavated area. Its links with the other burials in the settlement are established on the basis of the data from a child burial in contracted supine position from building horizon IX, which is also without ochre (No. 2 after Katincharov).

The burials in the Ezero tell belong to the Ezero culture. The burials in settlements from Yunatsite, the earliest of which preceded those from Ezero, are referred to the Western Thracian variant of that culture, which perhaps represented a separate group.

There are no data about the burials in the settlements from the other areas of Bulgaria.

### Flat necropolises and single nontumular burials

**Upper Thracian Lowland.** The only flat necropolis which has been studied in the Upper Thracian Lowland is the one close to the Bereket tell near Stara Zagora, dated

to the EBA I, and possibly preceding building horizon XIII of the Ezero tell. According to the preliminary information, the inhumation burials are skeletons in a contracted position on the side (Katincharov 1980:168). The burial goods comprise ceramic vessels, metal objects and lumps of ochre (Černych 1978: tabl. 29:8,9,13; Katincharov 1980:138; Troya i Trakia 1982: No. 457-459). This necropolis belongs to the Ezero culture.

**Northeastern Bulgaria.** There are preliminary informations about flat inhumation graves with skeletons in contracted position on the left, coloured with ochre from Durankulak (Todorova – Dimov 1989:15) (EBA I). The investigations have been carried out on flat necropolises containing inhumation burials near Batin, Rousse district, and Devnya, Varna district, dated to EBA II.

The flat inhumation necropolis Batin between Rousse and Yantra river has been excavated in 1979 (Stančev 1989:7-13, tabl. I-III). Eleven EBA II burials were found there in 2 lines and 1 Late Bronze Age grave (Coslogeni culture) at a depth of 0,50-0,70 m, but a 0,70 m layer had been taken off before the excavations. Seven of the EBA burials were with partially preserved skeletons. All of the Batin graves are single burials. According to D. Stančev, grave 8 had probably consisted of two consecutive burials which have been found out near the surface.

The Batin burials are pit-graves with skeletons in a contracted position on the right and only grave 3 has a skeleton in a contracted position on the left. The pits have an average size of 1,50 m length and 0,70 m width. All the skeletons are with South-North orientation, with the exception of the two skeletons from grave 8 which have North-South orientation. Having in mind the preserved skeletons or parts of them, we can define types of the hands' positions:

- first type – one hand stretched behind the body and the other crouched at the elbow (in front of the breast, on the breast or with wrist under the head);
- second type – the two hands crouched at the elbows in front of the breast.

Ceramic *askoi* vessels have been found in four graves – each one, near the head (Stančev 1989 tabl. II).

There are many common features and peculiarities between the flat necropolis Batin and the flat necropolis Zimnicea (Muntenia), where 38 single and 6 double EBA burials are investigated (Alexandrescu 1974). The similarities are as follows:

1. Inhumation as the only mode of burial rite.
2. Predominance of the skeletons in a contracted position on the right.
3. Main orientations of the skeletons South-North.
4. Two types of the hands' positions.
5. *Askoi* vessels as grave goods.
6. Presence of ochre, but absence of skeletons coloured with ochre (with the exception of grave No. 9 of Zimnicea necropolis), etc.

There are also many essential differences. The Zimnicea necropolis differs from the Batin necropolis in the following points:

1. Double burials are found in it.

2. The orientation of the skeletons is not only South-North, despite the fact that South (SE, SW) – North (NW, NE) orientation predominates.

3. There are more than two types of the hands' positions.

4. Not only askoi but other types of ceramic vessels have been also found as burial goods.

5. Metal ornaments have been found in some of the graves.

6. Stones connected with some graves are characteristic of this necropolis, etc.

P. Roman synchronizes Zimnicea necropolis with Coțofeni II a (pre- Glina) (Roman 1986: 30-35) on the basis of the synchronization Coțofeni I – pre-Glina III – Troy II. This synchronization can also be determined on the basis of the presumption of the Coțofeni I – Ezero A1 – pre-Troy I – Cernavodă III (EBA I) and Kostolac – Vučedol – Coțofeni II-III – Glina I-III – Cernavoda II – Ezerovo II – Ezero A2-B1 – Troy I-II (?) (EBA II) cultural horizons (Nikolova 1991: 31-32).

The dating of the Zimnicea and Batin necropolises back to the earliest EBA II period is confirmed by the fact that the *askoi* vessels from Zimnicea (Alexandrescu 1974: pl. 4,5:1-5) and Batin have close analogies in the earlier EBA layer of the settlement mound of Junatsite from the excavations of V. Mikov (Mikov 1940: fig. 19 upper). One of the vessels of Zimnicea (Alexandrescu 1974: fig. 5:4) has a shape also similar to the vessel from Ezero XIII (Georgiev et al. 1979: fig. 172d) and the vessel from the necropolis at the Bereket tell, Stara Zagora (Troia i Trakia 1982: No. 463), differing from them only at the handle which has a part, attached to its lower end. But there are later parallels which probably represent the diachronous connections. The handles of one of the vessels from Zimnicea (Alexandrescu 1974: pl. 7:5) are similar to the handles of the vessel from Basarabi (Coțofeni IIIa) (Roman 1976: pl. 94). Some of the ornaments from Zimnicea (Alexandrescu 1974: pl. 8) have analogies in the necropolis of the Pit-Grave culture Goran-Slatina (North-Central Bulgaria), which can be synchronized with the late Coțofeni II – early Coțofeni III (Kitov et al. 1991: fig. 35c; 41e, f), as well as with the other later Pit-Grave culture graves of the EBA II period in the Lower Danube Basin. There are also vessels with analogies in Ezerovo II (Alexandrescu 1974: pl. 5:8; Tončeva 1981: fig. 21:1, 12, 13), which might have generally belonged to the EBA II period.

The flat inhumation necropolises from Batin and Zimnicea are probably synchronous with the flat necropolis from Devnya, Varna district, where have been found at least 4 graves with contracted skeletons on the right from EBA in the area of the Middle Age necropolis (Ivanov 1974: 250-253, tabl. 4). The similarities between Batin and Devnya necropolises are expressed in the inhumation rite, the contracted position of the skeletons on the right and the ceramic vessels as grave goods. No coloured skeletons with ochre have been found in the graves of Varna-Devnya and Batin, but we ought to have in mind that some of the graves have been destroyed. In contrast to Batin in Devnya the orientations of the skeletons are various (W-E, SE-NW, N-S, E-W); one of the graves is with flat slabstone and stones around the pit-grave sides under it. The above mentioned grave has three vessels – 2 bowls (1 semispherical and 1 conical) and 1 jar (Ivanov 1974: pl. 4:3-5), typical of the EBA period with some analogies to the vessels from Ezerovo II

(Tončeva 1981: fig. 19:9; 20:1-2). The grave goods include also one flint knife (Ivanov 1974: fig. 10). There are no *askoi* vessels.

According to the ceramic material, the flat necropolis from Devnya can be attributed to the Ezerovo II culture on the basis of the ceramic of the graves and the corded ware sherds which were found in the necropolis area.

According to I. Ivanov they have probably belonged to the destroyed graves. The stone construction probably reflects the diachronous undirect connections with Usatovo burial rites. The cultural belonging of the necropolis near Batin has not been determined yet.

**Northwestern Bulgaria.** Ceramic vessels from destroyed single nontumular cremation burials have been discovered in Northwestern Bulgaria (Ostrov, Selanovtsi, Galiche) (Nikolov 1982: 197-198, pl. 2-3).

On the basis of the ceramic material found, the cremation untumular burials can be attributed to the Coțofeni II-III culture (Nikolova 1991:24; Nikolova 1991). Their cultural belonging to Coțofeni II-III culture is determined on the basis of the vessel, found at Ostrov (Nikolov 1982: fig. 2d) with incised horizontal alder ornament (type D according to P. Roman) similar also to the Kostolac vessel from Padina (Jovanović 1974: T. VII:2) and the vessels in the burial mound with cremation graves in Turnava I (Panajotov 1989: fig. 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 45b) with analogies in Coțofeni IIIa culture (Roman 1976: pl. 89:1; 95:1; 97:1,5; 115:1; cp. Comșa 1976:37). The *askoi* vessels from Galiches (Nikolov 1982: fig. 2a,c) could also have dated to the EBA II period. The nearest analogy is the vessel from the unexcavated EBA settlement near Crushovitsa (Northwestern Bulgaria) (Nikolov 1967: fig. 4). This type of *askoi* is typical to the Ezerovo II site (Tončeva 1981: fig. 8), which on the basis of the ornamented vessels with analogies in Ezerovo A2-B1 can be referred to the EBA II period. The *askoi* from Selanovtsi (Nikolov 1982: fig. 3) can be explained as an imitation of the *askoi* vessels from Caliche and it can also have belonged to the Coțofeni II-III culture.

#### **Tumular necropolises**

The data about the tumular necropolises are the most numerous.

**Northeastern Bulgaria.** There, partial studies have been carried out of tumuli containing EBA inhumation burials (Tsarevbrod, Madara, Kyulevcha, Kalugeritsa, Plachidol, Belogradets, Zheglartsi-Orlyak, Izboul, Shabla and Gehanovo) (Panajotov 1989: Nikolova 1992a; Kitov 1992: 51-53, pl. 2; Nikolova 1991). The skeletons are in contracted positions (supine, semi-supine or on the side), or extended. Ochre is scattered over most of the skeletons. Graves without grave goods predominate, though there are also finds of ceramic vessels or metal pendants.

The propagation of EBA tumular necropolises in Northeastern Bulgaria is connected with the penetration from the Dniestr-Danube and Northern Dobroudja region of the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture at the end of EBA I and the beginning of EBA II (3100-3000 BC) (Nikolova 1992). Some of the secondary burials with skeletons in contracted position on the side could have belonged to the indigenous population (Ezerovo II culture) and they may have been from the Middle or Late Bronze Age (*ibid.*).

**North-Central Bulgaria.** The only thoroughly studied EBA tumular necropolis from Bulgaria is Goran-Slatina in the basin of the river Osum (Kitov et al. 1991), dated to EBA II. It is characterized by inhumation burials in contracted positions (supine, semi-supine or on the side), or extended. Some of the graves contain offerings in the form of decorative ornaments made of metal, mountain crystal and bone; a small limestone axe, a metal chisel, flint artefacts, etc.

The tumular necropolis Goran-Slatina reflects the penetration of the Pit-Grave culture from Northeastern Bulgaria, and all burials are attributed to it. The necropolis is localized in the Eastern periphery of the Coşofeni culture. The contacts between the Pit-Grave culture and the Coşofeni culture can be seen in the fragmented ceramic vessels found, which have parallels in Coşofeni II-III (Kitov et al., fig. 31). The absence of evidence about the existence of settlements from the Coşofeni culture along the Osum river may be explained with the presence of the Pit-Grave culture during EBA II. Not far from the Goran-Slatina necropolis is the Devetaki cave in which the earliest Bronze Age material (Mikov, Dzambazov 1960, 99-117) is dated to EBA III.

**Northwestern Bulgaria.** EBA tumular necropolises have been discovered and explored near Tărnava (Tărnava I-III), Kneža and Härlets (Nikolov 1982:192-194; Panajotov 1989:84-94; Nikolova 1992a). They contain inhumation burials with skeletons in contracted positions (supine or on the side) with ochre, as well as cremation burials. The standard grave goods comprise ceramic vessels. Metal head-ornaments have been also discovered.

The remaining inhumation burials in contracted supine position are attributed to the Pit-Grave culture. The two cremation burials from Tărnava I and perhaps the inhumation graves with contracted skeletons on the right from the same tumulus belong to the Coşofeni IIIa culture (Nikolova 1992a). The tumular cremation burials Tărnava II have unspecified cultural belonging, though it cannot be ruled out that they also belonged to the Coşofeni II-III culture. Despite the fact that there was found a vessel with corded ornamentation it is not possible to attribute this tumular grave to the Pit-Grave culture because until this moment there are no data about the cremation in the Pit-Grave culture burial rites.

**South-Central Bulgaria.** EBA tumular burials have been studied in the tumular necropolises in Ttoyanovo, Kovachevo, Malka Detelina and Golyama Detelina, Tărgovishte (Ovcharitsa and Susliika basin) and Dolno Sahrane (Upper Tundja basin) (Getov 1965: 209- 220; Panajotov 1989:82-85; Kančev 1991:41-60; Nikolova 1992a). The graves contain inhumation burials in contracted position, with or without ochre. The offerings in some of the graves consist of ceramic vessels, metal head-rings, flint artefacts etc.

The tumular necropolises reflect the penetration of the Pit-Grave culture into the Northeastern regions of the Upper Thracian Lowland from the Northeastern Bulgaria. The earliest tumular burials from mound 3 and the burials from the mound 4 from tumular necropolis Dolno Sahrane are with unclarified cultural attribution for the time being. The ornamentation of the vessel with incision including pseudocorded incised lines (Getov 1965, fig. 17) is similar to the ceramic of the Ezero B1 culture in Thrace. The bottom of one ceramic cup from Dabene-Sarovča tell (the basin of Stryama) (unpublished, excavations of the author) is ornamented with pseudocorded incision, also.

## THE APPEARANCE OF DIFFERENT BURIAL PRACTICES

Urn burials of newborn babies from the Upper Thracian Lowland most probably reflect cultural contacts with the Northeastern Aegean region (Thermi, Troy) (Nikolova 1991). The origin of burials of adult individuals in the Ezero tell is not clear for the time being. Most of them are found in the lowermost horizons of the EBA layer. They were a common element in the burial rituals of the cultures from the Baden-Kostolac-Vučedol-Ezero cultural horizon and of the Aegean cultural circle (Nikolova 1991). The absence of published or reliable data on burials in EBA settlements in the Lower Danubian Basin is probably due to the fact that settlements from that period in the region are poorly studied. The supine position of the skeleton with contracted legs from grave No. 5 reflects probably the diachronous link with the population which penetrated from the Northwestern Pontic coasts through the lands of present-day Northeastern Bulgaria. Unfortunately, for lack of published data about the Final Copper Age in Thrace (ca. 4000/3900 to ca. 3500/3400 BC) (Nikolova 1992) and the fact that there is still an unstudied stage of the earlier part of the EBA I in Thrace – proto - Ezero (Nikolova 1991:9), for the time being it is difficult to throw light on the origin both of the Ezero culture, and of the burials in settlements. The inhumation burials in the flat necropolises from Northeastern Bulgaria most probably reflect a diachronous link with the burial practices from the Final Copper Age (Cernavodă I) and EBA I (Cernavodă III culture). The flat necropolis at the Bereket tell (Thrace) is yet unpublished and because of the absence of the data of the burial practices from the Final Copper Age in Thrace it is not possible to decide over the problem of the origin of this ritual during the EBA in Thrace.

Cremation burials from the Northwestern Bulgaria testify to the penetration of the cremation ritual from the Middle Danubian Basin into the area of the Kostolac and Coțofeni cultures during EBA II (Nikolova 1991). The tumular necropolises are connected with the penetration of the Pit-Grave culture into the Bulgarian lands from the northeast. During the EBA that culture spread over considerable territories in the Lower Danubian Basin, Banat, Eastern Tisza and the Upper Thracian Lowland. There is isolated evidence in Central Balkans, Transylvania and Albania as well. The tumular burial practice was adopted by bearers of the other cultures (Nikolova 1992a).

### SOME ASPECTS OF THE CULT OF THE DEAD

**Grave pit and tumular embankment.** The perceiving of grave pit as the "home of the deceased" is best seen in the fact that the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture usually covered or faced it with wooden planks (Ecsedy 1979:44). However, the main semantic charge of tumular necropolises should be sought in the tumular embankment, which reflects cosmogonic eschatological notions.

**Orientation of the skeletons.** Skeletons in inhumation burials have different orientations. The prevalence of orientation to the west in the tumular necropolises of the Pit-Grave culture is probably connected with the solar cult.

**Ochre.** In EBA burials of Bulgaria the ochre has different colours (mainly on the base of the data of the Pit-Grave culture): red, yellowish-red, yellow, orange, dark-brown,

purple, etc. However, red ochre prevails. Ochre occurs in the burials in the following forms: (1) staining of the skeleton with ochre; (2) ochre stains close to the skeleton; (3) lumps of ochre placed in the grave. The staining is with different intensity: weaker or more abundant. A characteristic feature is that ochre is unevenly scattered over some of the skeletons. There are no differences in the colouring of male, female or children's skeletons. In some cases the ochre is replaced by finely ground limestone (Ezero, grave 1). The occurrence of burials without ochre suggests that it was not a mandatory element in EBA burial practices in the Bulgarian lands, being characteristic above all for burials in the Pit-Grave culture. At the same time, all burials in the flat necropolises near Batin and Devnya, as well as in the tumular necropolis near Dolno Sahrane, are without ochre. This fact gives grounds to assume that ochre had purifying function above all.

Ochre is one of the most characteristic elements in the burial rituals of the Pit-Grave culture. In most burials lumps of ochre are the only grave goods found. Ochre was also most probably associated with the sacral function of certain parts of the human body in the burial ritual. Arguments in support of such a hypothesis are:

- extremely frequent colouring of the skull in Pit-Grave culture burials, which might be connected with the cult of the human head;

- colouring of certain parts of the skeleton only, or colouring of different parts of the skeleton with different intensity (in the latter case, however, accident cannot be totally ruled out). The burial rituals of the Pit-Grave culture sometimes consist in colouring of the skull only; the right or the left hand (wrist); the wrists of the feet, etc. For example, in Zheglartsi-Orlyak (tumulus I, grave 1) only the skull, wrists and feet of an adult individual (20-25 years old) were coloured, while in Plachidol I (tumulus II, grave 6) – the skull, the left palm and the feet of a 30-40-year-old man. Only the right hand of a 20-25-year-old individual (probably male), in combination with the skull, the chest and the pelvis (without the feet), are covered with red ochre in Zheglartsi-Orlyak (tumulus II, grave I) (Panajotov 1989: p. 112, 122, 127). Ochre is scattered only over the left hand (without the right one) in Goran-Slatina (tumulus II, grave 4; tumulus VII, grave 5). In the first grave case the left hand is coloured together with the chest, the pelvis and the upper half of the legs (the skull is fractured and fragmented, the feet are missing), in the second case – with the skull, chest and toes. The left arm and the left leg without the feet of a skeleton are slightly stained (together with the shoulder blades), without the skull from the same necropolis (tumulus III, grave 6). However, a lump of ochre is found next to the right hand of the same skeleton (Kitov et al. 1991, p. 56, 69, 96). All cited burials contain grave goods, some of which are metal objects. (See also Ecsedy 1979: 39-40).

**Grave goods.** Since burials without grave goods predominate, the discovery of ceramic vessels may be associated with ritual sacrifices, perhaps with the exception of the vessels discovered close to the head of the deceased, when his or her hands are folded towards the face. In those cases it is possible that the vessels contained sacrificial offerings of food to the deities in the world beyond. The articles of adornment in the metal tools are a manifestation of the property or ideological stratification.

**Anthropomorphic steles.** They are the most eloquent manifestation that the cult of the dead was closely linked to the ancestor cult in the burial rites of the Pit-Grave culture (Plachidol I; tumuli I-II; Plachidol II) (Panajotov 1989: fig. 63, 79).

#### **Links of the cult of the dead with other cults**

**Cult of the skull.** A headless skeleton is discovered in one of the tumular burials belonging to the Pit-Grave culture in the Goran-Slatina necropolis, tumulus III, grave 6 (Kitov et al. 1991: 68-69) and probably Tsarevbrod, tumulus I, grave 3 (Popov 1932:94-95). These data probably reflect the existence of a cult of the skull, which it may be connected with the fertility cult among the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture.

**Cult of the home and home hearth.** Burials of newborn babies within the settlements (Ezero, Yunatsite) are a manifestation above all of the cult of the home and of the home hearth. This fact finds indirect proof for the EBA in the tumular necropolises belonging to the Pit-Grave culture from Northeastern Bulgaria, where burials of newborn babies have been also discovered (Plachidol I, tumulus II, graves 1, 3, 7; Belogradets) (Tončeva 1978:232; Panajotov 1989: 105-112). The mobile way of life of the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture gives grounds for the assumption that the cult of the dead was interrelated with the cult of the home (hearth).

**Cult of the fire.** In the tumular necropolis Plachidol I (tumulus II) excavations have discovered a cult construction consisting of a burnt layer with ashes and charred remains, 0.65 m thick (*ibid.*, p. 110), reflecting the link between the cult of the dead and the fire cult. There is also evidence of burnt spot near a partially burned ochre-painted skeleton in contracted supine position from a Pit-Grave burial in Northeastern Bulgaria (Tsarevbrod, tumulus I, grave 3) (Popov 1932:95).

**Chthonic cult.** In the Goran-Slatina necropolis one of the tumular embankments (tumulus VI) is piled over a deep step-like cult pit, in the filling of which plaster from the dwellings and ceramic fragments were discovered (Kitov et al. 1991: 89-90). It is possible that the tumular cult construction revealed a link between a chthonic cult – ancestor cult and the cult of the home. In its turn, this is a serious argument in support of the functioning of tumular necropolises as cult centres of the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture.

#### **PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

**Model 1. Ezero.** The burials of adult individuals within the settlements can be perceived as a social characteristic, which is more typical for the Ezero tell by comparison to the Yunatsite tell. Several interpretations are possible in this case: preservation of some archaic tradition; their interpretation as ritual burials or as burials of poor community members. Some of the burials of adult individuals may also have occurred during the period of a levelling of the building horizon and construction of the houses in a new settlement, performing the functions of building sacrifices – a possible interpretation of some of the burials of newborn babies.

**Model 2. Batin-Zimnicea.** Another model of EBA burial rites is seen in the flat necropolises near Batin and Zimnicea, which are not far from one another and were most probably connected with clan communities. The absence of grave goods, with the exception of ceramic vessels in four out of the ten or eleven graves in Batin, as well as the fact



that there are burials with metal objects in the necropolis near Zimnicea, which is synchronous and typologically similar in the type of burials contained in it, suggests that the Batin necropolis probably belonged only to a poor clan community in contrast to the necropolis of Zimnicea where was property and social stratification.

**Model 3. Plachidol.** Unfortunately, due to the absence of comprehensively investigated tumular necropolises from Northeastern Bulgaria, it is still impossible to propose a constructive model of social stratification in the area of Pit-Grave culture in that macroregion. Most probably, however, there was a less manifested property differentiation in the region and the social stratification was connected above all with the ideological stratification (cp. Todorova 1984:65-66). It was probably reflected in a female burial (perhaps of a priestess), containing wooden wheels of a chariot (Plachidol I, tumulus I, grave 1) (Panajotov 1989: 95-98).

**Model 4. Goran-Slatina.** The existence of a property-social stratification during the EBA in the present-day Bulgarian lands is most eloquently reflected in the thoroughly studied tumular necropolis of Goran-Slatina (Kitov et al. 1991). Between one and ten burials have been discovered in eight of the nine tumuli. It cannot be ruled out that some of the secondary burials were destroyed before the archaeological excavations. A cult pit was discovered below the embankment of one of the tumuli. Fourteen out of the 34 graves contain grave goods. Three of the remaining graves are primary, whereby the actual tumular embankment may be perceived as a social symbol, although silver pendants have been found in one of the primary burials in the necropolis. The standard grave goods in some of the burials consist of metal articles of adornment (pendants and beads). However, excavations in one of the graves revealed a metal chisel – an extremely valuable object for that period, most probably testifying to contacts with the South. Although there are no data on the age and sex structure of the burials in the necropolis, the existence of burials with and without grave offerings in tumuli III and V most probably reflected a property differentiation, assuming that the tumular necropolis belonged to a big clan. At the same time, all burials in tumulus VII contain no grave goods, with the exception of one grave in which a flint was found. This fact suggests the existence of poor families within the Pit-Grave cultural group. The clearly manifested property differentiation in the Goran-Slatina necropolis suggests that the social structure of the bearers of the Pit-Grave culture was of the chieftdom type. Tumulus VII, which is close to the cult pit and contains no grave goods, could also be explained with the mechanism of penetration of the Pit-Grave cultural group, and the longer or shorter period spent by that group there. If desegmentation was the principal mechanism for the spreading of the Pit-Grave culture, then it is possible for tumulus VII to have belonged to the first settlers coming from Northeastern Bulgaria, some of whom gradually grew richer owing to their contacts with the South and with the bearers of the Coțofeni culture. This opportunity for contacts and for exchanges probably also explains the presence of numerous rich burials in the necropolis: a fact that was quite unusual for the Carpathian-Balkan region during the EBA.

**Model 5. Tărnava I.** The tumulus reflects the cultural interaction between the bearers of the Coțofeni culture and the Pit-Grave culture. It persistently shows standard

grave goods – ceramic vessels for the Pit-Grave culture, unlike Northeastern Bulgaria, where vessels occurred only by way of exception. There the only symbol of property stratification were the metal pendants found, one of which is made of gold (Tărnava I, graves 6, 7, 8) (Panajotov 1989: fig. 45a-47). Two gold pendants have been also discovered in burial 1 of the tumulus from Tărnava III (*ibid.*, fig. 53). Metal pendants were probably the traditional article of adornment for the middle strata of the clans in the Pit-Grave culture. However, it is possible that some of them reflected an ideological stratification as well. Some microregions between the rivers Iskar and Ogosta (the burial in the tumulus near Kneža) probably due to the lack of close contacts with the Coțofeni culture, have preserved the typical features of the Pit-Grave culture: the contracted supine position of the skeleton, absence of ceramic vessels, the only manifestation of the property and social differentiation being the gold earrings discovered. These data are no exception, because the evidence from the entire Lower Danubian Basin, Banat and Eastern Hungary suggests that even in the remotest areas the Pit-Grave culture preserved the typical features of its burial rites, notably the absence of grave goods or the presence of metal pendants. For this reason, in future studies the clarifying of the social stratification should most probably be associated with the comparative characteristics of the burial rituals of the Pit-Grave culture (localization of the grave, number of the graves, existence of double and triple burials, etc.) over vast regions, which is beyond the scope of the present work.

**Model 6. Tărnava II-Ostrov.** The combination of tumular and flat burials of the same type (cremation) in the area of the Late Coțofeni culture may also reflect social stratification, whereby the tumulus denoted a higher social status of the deceased, provided that Tărnava II belonged to the Coțofeni culture. The presence of the typical Pit-Grave culture tumular burial near to the Danube river (Hărlets) confirms this fact. But the tumular embankment of Tărnava II can only reflect the influence of the Pit-Grave culture over the burial rites of the Coțofeni culture, without being necessarily a social characteristic, also.



The data on the burial rituals are an extremely important source for the EBA cultures in the Bulgarian lands. At the same time, however, many of the sources have not been published, or the information is incomplete. Most of the necropolises belonging to the Pit-Grave culture have not been thoroughly studied. There are no data on the burial rituals along the Southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast and from Southwestern Bulgaria, and the information in the other regions is referred to certain EBA stages only. The further study of the most of the problems discussed above will become possible after the source base will have been extended.

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