Features of the Ritually Buried Horses by the Geto-Dacian Population during the Second Epoch of the Iron Age in the South-Eastern Romania. Their Socioeconomic and Worship Importance.

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One of Sophocles' personages declares that *«...the Thracians are fond of their horses»*[1]. Of course, the Geto-Dacian population, i.e. the northern stirps of the Thracians, had the same feelings for this animal, and they, too, not only appreciated horse's economic value, but also buried it ritually, either next to their dead or simply alone, sometimes with some pomp.

In the following lines we shall discuss the bone remains of these horses, ritually buried in tumulary tombs, next to human deceased, often incinerated. Some of them were princely tombs, within incineration necropolises, but they were apart from the tombs, in the settlements, or simply they were found in pits, in the vicinity of the settlements. We mention that they were discovered in the archaeological excavations of the Southeast of Romania, and the results of these researches are already published. Of course, a large quantity of these horse remains was also published, mainly in connection with the excavations. We shall try now to make up a sort of synthesis and to stress several features that were partially explained, or have to be explained.

a) Equidae from the tumulary necropolis at Histria, during the archaic period of development of the citadel (the IInd half of the 6th century BC).

In a recent paper one of the researchers who excavated there[2] goes back to his opinion, with some details concerning the fact that the ritual of the interment of the human corpse implied two basic stages which immediately succeeded one another. The first stage was focused on the incineration of the corpse and the second one - on the interment of the incineration remains. During this second stage, persons (who are not the object of our work), as well as sacrificed horses, were joined around the deceased at a certain distance. The author firstly presents the tumuli XX, XVII, XIX, that probably belonged to the same funerary plot, and secondly the tumulus XII, chronologically a little more recent than the others. In the tumulus XX a horse skeleton (maxillaries and vertebrae) was found, in XVII - skeletons of four horses, and in XIX - two horse legs. Unfortunately, none of these remains were studied. The tumulus XII is a little bit different: at the edge of the funerary surface, at several meters from the burning zone, two collective tombs were found (i.e. two shallow pits). Human skeletons in disarrayed position were revealed, almost with no personal object, mixed with dismembered limbs of horses and asses with no piece of harness. The tomb No 1, besides human skeletons, included four skulls, three thoraces and 28 whole or fragmentary legs of equidae. The tomb No 2, besides human skeletons and seven skulls, three thoraces and 22 whole or fragmentary legs of equidae, probably a

[1] Sophocles - *Theseus,* Fr. 523: *"Oh, Sun, thy light is a splendor for the Thracians, fond of their horses",* in Izvoare privind istoria României, (*Fontes Historiae)* Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 1964, 19.

[2] Alexandrescu 1994, 15 - 26.

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total of 12 skeletons of equidae. This material was thoroughly studied by Alexandra Bolomey[3], who specifies that it come from four horses and five asses. As for the horses, the researcher ascertained that the animals had a relatively big size (the height of the withers = 1395 - 1464 mm), comparatively graceful extremities and with some resemblance with those belonging to the IInd group of the well-known Scythian kurgan at Paziriks[4] (unfortunately the skulls being much too broken, they could not be rejoined to emphasize morphological and biological features). The relief of the long bones, very marked, reveals the fact that these horses were used as beasts of burden. An animal presents traces of a pathological disease. The author is right when she asserts that those horses belong to the oriental (eastern) group and considers that they probably have an Asiatic origin. As for the ass, it is interesting that there is a large quantity of this kind of remains at Histria. It is well-known that the ass is a thermophilous animal and it was probably very poorly spread in the Greek citadels on the western shore of Pontus Euxinus. Strabo and Herodotus relate that this species was very rare in the Helleniac citadels on the northern shore of the same sea. They also say that this animal was not able to endure the harshness of the winter (which probably was much rough in Crimea than nowadays, since there was the end of the Sub-Boreal period, which brought the regression of the Black Sea, named by Feodorov "The Fanagorean Phase")[5].

On the other hand, the Scythians did not know the ass. As a proof, it is enough to remember what Herodotus related about Darius' aggression with his army against the Scythians: the horses were frightened by the roar of the asses of the Persian camp, where they were brought as beasts of burden.

By all means, we do not know another case with ritual buried asses, alone or next to horses, in the Thraco-Geto-Dacian or Scythian worlds.

b) Horses from the princely tomb of the tumulus at Agighiol, dated around 400 BC[6] by D. Berciu, who took part in the excavations of 1931, date which we can push to the beginning of the 4th century. The archaeological research of the tumulus (surreptitious digging and violation were made since the ancient time) revealed two rooms in the main part, one for a man, and the other for a woman, where important museum pieces were took from, subsequently very thoroughly described. There was also discovered a complex which was untouched: there was a room at about 1.5 m from the main tomb, in which three horses were buried during the ceremony of the interment of the main personage. There were two arrow tips near one horse's skeleton, which, according to D. Berciu, emphasize that they were killed with poisoned arrows.

During the Second World War the horses' skeletons were partly lost. This is why Alexandra Bolomey[7] studied what she still found at the Archaeological Institute of Bucharest, that is parts from entire skeletons. The material consisted of a fragment of pre-maxillary (its incisors revealed an age of about 9 - 10 years) and several bones of the legs, most of them entire. The researcher asserts that, according to the dimensions of the bones, she firstly could record an animal of a relatively small size (the withers' height, revealed by a humerus = 132.4 cm), with a bone disease at the distant extremity of the radius. This means that the animal was "reformed", because it was no more able to be used a beast of burden or ride. Secondly, she recorded one or at the most two horses (she considers this possibility as being more plausible), having almost equal sizes, taking into account a humerus, which reveals a withers' height of 146.1 cm, a radius revealing a height of 147.5 cm and a metacarpus revealing a size of 144.2 cm (an average of 145.9 cm). All these data let us conclude that the animal had a high size.

To explain the different sizes of the horses, the author refers to S. Bökönyi's studies (see especially his synthesis, published later than

[3] Bolomey 1966, 387 - 396; Bolomey 1965, 179 - 180.
[4] Vitt 1952, 169 - 184.
[5] Feodorov 1957, 61.
[6] Berciu 1968, 19 - 22.
[7] Bolomey 1968, 27 - 31.

Bolomey's paper)[8]. He assigns the European horses of the Iron Age to the Western group, having a relatively narrow forehead, a prolonged facial part of the head, with relatively graceful legs and low size, 126 cm on average, but having a wide variability (Marek's Helvetian-Gallic horses). The other group, the Eastern one, have larger foreheads, shorter facial parts (though the heads are of similar length), less graceful legs and about 10 cm taller sizes (i.e. 136 cm on average). This group is also widely variable, since we find here horses taller than 140 cm.

We consider that mainly the Celts' horses belong to the first group (see the synthesis of the fauna of the Celtic *oppidum* at Manching in Bavaria[9], settlement which was exhaustively researched). The second group includes the horses of the Scythians of Pannonia (according especially to the material of the horses cemetery at Szentes-Vekerzug), the horses of the Carpathian Basin, those of the Thracians of Bulgaria, of the North-Pontic Scythians in an area prolonged as far as Siberia (Altai). The borderline between these two groups could be traced approximately from Vienna to Venice.

Bolomey obviously assigns to the Eastern group the shorter size horse (the ordinary one), with bone lesions, but she refers mainly to that (those) of tall size, resembling to the horses found at Histria, which she asserts that it is possible to be imported from the Scythians for the usage of the aristocracy. This data is in concordance with the princely tomb found at Agighiol, where the horse followed its master after his death. Is also is possible that these horses were brought here for the improve of the horses with tall size found by the author of the present paper in the culture Noua, dated at the end of the Bronze Age[10].

c) The horse found in the princely tomb at Peretu, dated in the 4th century BC. This tomb is well known due to its valuable museum pieces, especially the silver helmet gilt with gold. The horse's bones were found together with those of the deceased. The skull and some of the bones of the legs can be distinguished on the burnt surface[11].

This horse was handed to Alexandra Bolomey for research, but no study was published about it[12]. Three dogs skeletons and a Bovidae skeleton were also found in this tumulus[13].

d) The horses in the incineration necropolis at Zimnicea, dated in the 4th - 2nd centuries BC. According to A.D. Alexandrescu[14], 13 horses were buried here, one by one dispersedly between the human tombs.

Some horses were buried entire, and the whole skeleton is present, better or worse preserved. Only one horse skull (No 3) was completed. As for the other 12, the teeth were retrieved (totally or partially) and fixed with wax. The horse No 13 is almost entirely burnt on another place and subsequently disposed in the pit, being almost wholly disordered. This is why no measurement was made on it. The ploughing disarrayed the bones of the horse No 12, crushing some of them. Modern age digging eliminated the whole fore part of the horse No 9. The right autopodium of the horse No 8 is missing (by chance or due to an intention?).

The horses Nos 3, 5 10 had only the head and the fore and posterior autopodiums disposed into the pits (see also the figures 1 and 2 within the work mentioned at the note 14, as well as the enumeration within our paper[15]). It is obvious that these horses were ritually buried, since they have few harness pieces, according to which we can conclude that the animals were disposed in chronologically different periods. For those to which the sex was possibly to be determined, we consider that they were males, probably

[8] Bökönyi 1974, 246 - 262.
[9] Boessneck and al. 1971, 13 - 32.
[10] Haimovici 1966, 42 - 44; idem, other two works on the archaeozoology of Noua Culture, under press.
[11] Moscalu 1989, 136, pos. 3.
[12] Unfortunately, due to Alexandra Bolomey's unexpected death, we have about this horse only one information (which she gave me in 1985). She asserts that the horse had a small size (131,8 cm), being an ordinary one.
[13] Moscalu 1989, 134, fig. 2.
[14] Alexandrescu 1983, 69 – 78, fig. 3.
[15] Haimovici 1983, 79 - 107.

castrated. It is quite interesting that these horses were of ages between 3.5 and 11 - 12 years, which is the period of the life when they are economically the most valuable. Only the horse No 6, the oldest one, has some bone pathological lesions at the vertebrae, which do not encroach upon its activity, we consider.

All these horses (12 for which we could make measurements, calculate indices, relations between the segments, size, according to Kiesewalter coefficients and to Vitt's scale, all of this data available in the work mentioned at note 15) belong to the eastern pattern, as the only skull which we had at our disposition shows, as well as the withers' height, having values between 129.5 - 145.6 cm, that is 136.7 cm on average.

Few of them (horses Nos 4, 6, perhaps No 10 too) are taller than all the rest (1.40 - 1.45 m), and we called them "elite horses". They had smaller and more graceful skulls (taking into account their micro-dentition), subtle necks, tall legs (with a certain disharmony, that is an overgrowing of the stylopodium - humerus and femur, and especially of the zeugodium - more for the radius, less for the tibia). This fact is somehow a drawback for the metapodium (metacarpus and metatarsus), which is well-known to be usually long in the case of the actual riding horses. The horses mentioned above are similar to those found at Histria and the tall horse at Agighiol, studied by Bolomey. We consider that these horses are not imported from Scythia, but they were obtained from another genofond, that is the belonging to the culture Noua. The Geto-Dacian population ameliorated these horses through the competitive selection of the mares for reproduction, the careful breeding, abundant and top quality feeding of the colts and through their gelding at an early age, which has as a result the longer period of function of the cartilaginous disks of the long bones. Thus, the height of the animal could be increased with some centimeters. It is interesting that riders on such horses are represented on the helmet discovered at Agighiol, and that the horses had the hair of the mane and of the tail cropped[16].

Therefore, these animals called "elite horse" belonged to the Thraco-Dacian aristocracy, and they were used for riding, probably in fight, as well as parade horses. The others had bigger heads, stouter necks, though they had the segments of the legs almost equal, well proportioned, resulting a smaller size. We can include these horses in the pattern of the eastern group, which could be called as "ordinary horses", prevalently used as beasts of burden and of drive.

Another problem which we consider to be solved is whether there is a relation between the Traco-Geto-Dacian horses and the tarpan *(Equus caballus gmelini),* still found as a wild beast during the 19th century in the North-Pontic steppes, but wholly exterminated till the end of the same century. It is well-known that the tarpan had short and very stout phalanges. Our horses have these bones much longer and more graceful, Brauner's indices being lower than in the situation of the tarpan. This is the reason to conclude that these horses cannot be arisen from it.

On the other hand, we think that the tarpan was nothing but a maroon, which appeared through the turn wild of a tame horse.

e) The horses of Cătunu, settlement dated in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. It is situated on the middle course of Ialomița River (Dîmbovița County)[17]. Two horses (No 1 and No 2) were found buried here and were studied by S. Haimovici[18]. The horse No 1 is situated at the edge of the settlement and has no inventory. In fact, similarly to the three horses found in the necropolis at Zimnicea, only the head and the extremities of the legs were found (we stress that the right fore autopodium is missing). The skull is broken, only the teeth are preserved, according to which we can estimate an age of an adult of about 4.5 years. According to the existing metapodes, we calculated a withers' height of

[16] Haimovici 1992, 138 - 144.
[17] Stoica 1984, 138 - 144.
[18] Haimovici 1984, 145 - 149.

only 131.1 cm, which leads to the conclusion that the bone remains belonged to an ordinary horse. The horse No 2 can be considered complete. It was found in the pit No 19 of the settlement, next to pottery, which certifies the chronology. Still, we emphasize that the left fore autopodium is missing and the animal is of mature age, about 8 - 9 years old. The relation between the segments reveal with no doubt the strong lengthening of the stylopodium but especially that of zeugopodium (radius and tibia), since one can remark the lack of the harmony of growing between the three segments of the proper leg. Its proximal part is relatively longer than the autopodium. The general size (using Kiesewalter's coefficients) is of 140.3 cm, but if we calculate only according to the bones of the metapodium, it is of only 133.0 cm. It is obvious that we are faced with an "elite horse" of Thraco-Geto-Dacian pattern.

f) The horse in the settlement at Coinea II - Căscioarele (Călăraşi County).

In the settlement Coinea II, on the terrace of the former lake Coinea several pits were found. Tame and wild animals, ritually buried were discovered in these pits. In the pit No 1 was discovered a whole horse overlaying a hare. The pit was dated in the 4th century BC. The horse was buried with the harness on it[19]. The skeleton is quite badly preserved. It probably belonged to a male of four years old. We could make only several measurements of the long bones of the legs[20]. Thus, the two tibias reveal a wither's height of only 132.5 cm, and the four metapodals reveal an average size of 132.6. It is possible to remark the harmony of growing of the zeugopodium and metapodium. In fact, the authors of the article consider they are faced with an ordinary horse.

g) The horse at D'aia parte - Căscioarele (Călăraşi County)

At several hundred meters far from the Getic citadel, on the terrace of Cătălui Lake, was discovered a pit in which there was a whole horse next to some pottery, dated in the 4th - 3rd centuries BC[21]. The horse was of at the most 4 - 5 years and had a withers' height of about 1.33 - 1.35 m, representing an ordinary one. Only the skull could be completed, even a part of the dentition and some long bones, more or less entire, were recovered.

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The data mentioned above reveal that the Thraco-Geto-Dacian population used to slaughter horses at the tomb of a person or they put them next to the deceased, to be useful during the life of beyond. It is possible to proceed like that only when the deceased was from the tribal aristocracy or a prince. Sometimes they simply buried horses (it is sure that they were intentionally killed) in cemeteries, in settlements, at the edge of these settlements or at a certain distance from them. This fact was in concordance with a ritual, which we obviously cannot overtake. Concerning the disposing of the offerings or the way that the sacrifices were made, it is sure that in comparison with other communities, this people did not behave according to an economic mentality (that is, to sacrifice an animal having a specific small size simply to respect the ritual). It is possible that when they offered only the head and the distal extremities of the legs, which from the point of view of the edibility were almost with no value, they also behaved economically, but we cannot be sure of this assertion. As we have already shown above, sometimes the distal extremity of a

[19] Sîrbu and al. 1992, 25 - 30.
[20] Udrescu, Dobre 1992, 31 - 36.
[21] This horse was found by the archaeologist Done Şerbănescu of The Museum of Archaeology Oltenița. We acknowledge him for commiting us the bone material together with the data referring to the position and the chronology. Since we still work on this material, we are not able to give further detail.

leg could be absent in the case of the disposition of an entire horse, or even when only the head and the extremities were put in the pit. Did they use to do that for a special reason, or it is just a fortuity because of the hurry of disposing the remains of the horse into the pit ?

It is interesting that only seldom "reformed" horses and not at all old horses, which were not useful any more. There is an explanation for this fact: the master used that horse and still was fond of it. We are now a little further from the economic outlook, but we are closer to the strictly ritual sphere, from which pecuniary possibilities, sometimes quite big, appeared. We wish to detail another fact: the horses No 1 at Zimnicea and No 1 at Cătunu have on the upper jaw the tooth P^1, an atavistic one, which is very rare nowadays. Is it possible these horses to be considered by those who chose them to have preternatural power and to be uncanny and enchanted, aspects that very often appear in the Romanian folklore ? If so, the burial was made to offer the horses something good what they deserved to have, or to satisfy them a wish.

Another problem has to be solved. The horsemeat was edible in the Thraco-Geto-Dacian world. Taking into account the sizes of these animals, this food covered an essential part of the protein necessity of the population, as came out from the domestic rests discovered in the settlements[22]. We consider that the horses, sacrificed or buried, were not emaciated or fleshed off. They were killed, and after the cadaverous rigidity disappeared they were entirely put into the pits, which sometimes were smaller than the animal. The pit could have the shape of an overturned bell, having as a result unnatural position of the horses, sometimes with crouched legs. It is interesting that those who dealt with this thing were very deft in detaching the bones from the articulation with a sharp tool, which operated only on the ligaments and tendons of the muscles. They did not break the bone and did not leave any trace on it, as reveals the material of this species found in the domestic rests. Where only the head and the extremities of the legs were disposed, the separation of the head from the atlas vertebra was so perfectly done than not a piece of it was found, and the occipital condyles have no trace of deliberate cut or break. This action was always done only in the course of the subsequent events, due to the biotic or abiotic influence of the soil, especially when these remains were discovered by the archaeologist and when the pieces came into contact with the atmosphere.

At the same time it obvious that Thraco-Geto-Dacians had two types of horses: ordinary and "elite". Though these types were not completely separated, having intermediary individuals, our ancestors were concerned with the amelioration of this species. This must be emphasized since the ancients considered this population "barbarian". Therefore, though few (perhaps they died on the field of battle or were ritually buried), remains of the horses of "elite" (long bones, according to which the size was calculated) could be found between the domestic rests within the settlements (see table 1 at pages 146 - 147 of the work at note 22).

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[22] Haimovici 1987, 149.

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