

# SANCTUAR-TUMULUS OF SCYTHIAN PERIOD FROM MOCRA (MIDDLE DNIEPER RIVER)

M. KASUBA

During the process of building of the Scythian tumuli having poli-functional character, including the cult function, the establishing of the "ritual" elements has an outstanding importance, being directly connected with the magic rituals which accompanied the interment. Hereby we can assign the various sacred-magic actions, also having in view the organizing of the exterior area of the tumulus (Bessonova 1990; Olihovskii 1991, 1993).

The Scythian sanctuaries dated for the 5<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC known within the necropoleis (including the tumular ones) are featured by the lack of the tombs, the unusual organizing of the inner space, vestiges of the ritual actions, as well as by the limited temporal character of their utilization, for the forthcoming time being covered with earth (Bessonova 1990, Mahortih 1993). The tumulus from the Middle Dnieper River, dated for the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, is assigned to this type of Scythian constructions with ritual-cult character.

The Scythian sanctuary was put in evidence in the context of a tumular necropolis belonging to various historical epochs, situated at 3 km south-eastwards from Mochra village, RibniĖa County, Moldavian Republic. Due to the partial investigation of this group, during the campaign of 1990 no Scythian tomb was discovered. The basic features of the investigated construction, as well as the fragments of the Greek amphoras, allow the assignment of this tomb to the Scythian period.

On the surface of an oval mound (23 x 20 m; height = 0.2 - 0.25 m), oriented on the NE-SW direction, fragments of limestone of various size and wood-coal were brought to light, together with three walls and a fragment of an ear of a red coloured Greek amphora, all dated for the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Under the mantle, at the level of the undisturbed clay, a rectangular-shaped ditch with rounded corners (15 x 12 m) was discovered. The orientation of this ditch was along the NE-SW direction. At the western side there was an interruption, as wide as 2.5 m. The breadth of the ditch is variable between 0.9 - 1.0 m and 1.7 m. Its filling consists of compact chernozem and limestone. In the north-western corner we found a stock of 17 walls of Greek amphoras dated for the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the central part of the surface limited by the ditch, at various depths from the actual level, there were three pits, having different size and orientation.

In the middle part, at the opposite side from the interruption, as deep as -0.53 m, there was a rectangular-shaped pit with rounded corners (1.1 x 0.6 m, with the depth of -0.37 m), oriented along the NW-SE direction. Its filling consisted of spongy chernozem with a large quantity of coal. On the bottom there were the rests of a burnt stele-pillar, which was placed in vertical position (diameter = 0.4 m).

The second pit was situated at 0.2 m westwards from the first one, as deep as -1.4 m. Its shape was oval (2.1 x 1.5 m, depth -0.6 m). The orientation was along the direction SWW-NEE. The filling consists of compact chernozem with a large quantity of small and middle size limestone pieces, mixed with fragmented human bones (two ribs, two fragments of mandible, a fragment of a skull, three vertebra and a tibia). We also found fragments of animal bones (five fragments of jaw, a fragment of shoulder blade and three vertebra).

The third pit was placed at 1 m south-eastwards from the first one, at the depth of -1.5 m. It was rectangular-shaped, with rounded corners (1.3 x 1 m, depth -0.4 m). The orientation was along the direction NE-SW. The filling consists of compact chernozem and limestone.

The basic features of the investigated construction consist in the lack of the tombs, the remains of the cult manifestations - human (?) and animal sacrifices, the limitation of the surface by a ditch and the emphasize of the sacred center by a stele-pillar (along with the subsequent burning of this one), as well as the covering of the place with earth. All this aspects allow to assign this construction to the category of the Scythian sanctuar-tumuli.

We emphasize among the particularities of the cult construction near Mochra village the rectangular shape of the ditch and the presence inside this one of the stones, as well as the traces of the human sacrifice (ritual cannibalism ?). A specific feature of the Scythian tumular architecture consists in the presence of the circular

ditch. The eastern cult construction from Tagisken, Ceas-Tepe, etc. represent far-off analogies of the ditch found at Mocra. The researchers consider the presence of the square- and rectangular-shaped ditches at the Sarmatians as being connected to the Central European traditions of the Latène epoch (Simonenko, 1991). We stress that the digging of the rectangular and circular ditches is related to a common function - the limitation of the ritual zone along with the emphasize of the sacral center. In this situation, the ditch represented the limit of the world of beyond, and the only place where it was possible to be accessed was a narrow place - the interruption (Olihovskii, 1993). The stone bedding of the ditch is an usual phenomenon for the Middle Dnieper River, where, during the Pre-Scythian and Scythian epochs, it was revealed the use of the stones within the tombs. This aspect possibly has an explanation in the local environment (Gutal, 1980).

The human sacrifices and the rituals related to the human body (the skeleton) are well-known in the Scythian funeral rituals. In the tombs from the North-Pontic Steppe the cult of the skull was usual. This ritual was performed through the interment of beheaded bodies and the discovery of the skulls in other places (Redina, 1994). In Matroninsk and Knisevsk cities whole and fragmentary human skulls were found, as well as mandibles (Gavris, 1991; Bessonova, Skorii, 1993). In the city from Knisevsk an altar was also found, with the remains of the sacrifice - a dog and a human skull (Gavris, 1992). In the workshops for the artifacts made of bone, found in the cities from Beliskoe and Kamenskoe, fragments of human skulls and bones of the upper and lower limbs (Radzievskaja, Sramko, 1980; Gavriiliuk, 1992). We should also mention the sanctuary dated for the 6<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC from Beliskoe city, where 8 calottes of human skulls and 5 mandibles were discovered (Sramko, 1987).

The fundamental features of the sanctuar-tumulus near Mocra village, presented above, allow to assign it to the Scythian cult and ritual constructions.