

Burial Practices of the Local Early Bronze Age Cultures in Bulgaria

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The purpose of the present research is to be done a general characterization of actual state of study on the burial rites of the local Early Bronze Age cultures in the Bulgarian lands. On the basis of the main characteristics of the burial rites during the Early Bronze Age in Bulgaria and by analogy with state in neighbour lands, we may outline the directions of the cultural contacts and see partial similarities of the cultural phenomena.

The local Early Bronze Age cultures in the Bulgarian lands are: Ezero in Southeast Bulgaria, Ezerovo II (Chernavoda II) in Northeast Bulgaria and the Black Sea shore, Coțofeni in Northwest Bulgaria. Southwest Bulgaria is connected with the cultural development of the Central Balkans, which covered the regions of the stream of the rivers Strouma, Mesta, Nishava and Morava. The Pit-Grave culture is not local culture. It interrelates with the local cultures penetrating into its areas.

The researches on the burial rites of Ezero culture are connected with the names of R. Katincharov¹, K. Leshtakov², P. Kalchev³, L. Nikolova⁴. The burial rites of the culture Ezerovo II are studied by H. Todorova⁵, G. Toncheva⁶, I. Zmeikova⁷, I. Ivanov⁸, D. Stanchev⁹. The burials from Southwest Bulgaria are not published till now, but on the basis of the explorations of the Central Balkans as a whole we can presume

identity in the burial rites. The burial practices of culture Coțofeni are studied by P. Roman¹⁰ and for Bulgaria by I. Panayotov, St. Alexandrov¹¹. The explorations of the Pit-Grave culture are made by B. Nikolov¹², I. Panayotov¹³, V. Dergachev¹⁴, M. Kanchev¹⁵, T. Kancheva¹⁶, K. Leshtakov¹⁷ and others. Early Bronze Age graves and necropoleis in the Bulgarian lands are present in Fig. 1¹⁸.

The Early Bronze Age culture Ezero includes the Upper Thracian lowland and the Valley of Toundza River. In its development are distinguished three stages: Ezero, Mihalich and Sveti Kirilovo. The burials in the area of Ezero culture are made in settlements (intramural) and in flat necropoleis. The intramural burials are two groups: of infants (most numerous) and of adults.

The infants are buried in pits and urns under the floors of the dwellings or under the foundations of the hearth and ovens of the houses. Eleven burials are known from Ezero settlement mound: three from South-west stratigraphic ditch, one from Northeast and seven from the Central ditch. The burials in the Central sector according to the horizons are divided as follows: IX building horizon – one, VII horizon –

¹ Katincharov 1980, 167 - 172; Георгиев et al. 1979, 491 - 496.

² Лешаков, Борисов 1995, 9 - 33; Лешаков, Попова 1995, 65 - 84.

³ Kalchev 1996, 215 - 225.

⁴ Николова 1992, 1 - 10; Nikolova 1995, 271 - 276.

⁵ Тодорова 1974, 84 - 93; 1980; 1984, 67 - 71.

⁶ Тончева 1972, 309 - 315; Toncheva 1981, 41 - 62.

⁷ Zmeikova 1991, 137 - 144.

⁸ Иванов 1972, 250 - 253.

⁹ Станчев 1980, 62; 1989, 7 - 12.

¹⁰ Roman 1977, 35 - 38.

¹¹ Панайотов, Александров 1988, 1 - 13; Александров 1994, 85 - 90; Alexandrov 1995, 253 - 270.

¹² Николов 1964, 69 - 77; 1976, 38 - 51; 1982, 192 - 200.

¹³ Панайотов 1989; Панайотов, Александров 1995; Китов et al. 1991; Panayotov, Dergachev 1984, 99 - 116.

¹⁴ Дергачев 1986.

¹⁵ Кънчев 1991, 41 - 70.

¹⁶ Кънчева-Русева, Кънчев 1991, 42 - 43; Кънчева-Русева, Гоцев 1994, 30 - 31.

¹⁷ Лешаков, Борисов 1995, 9 - 33; Лешаков, Попова 1995, 65 - 84.

¹⁸ The question mark in the table means that the grave is not published. The information is from the preliminary reports.

one, IV horizon – one, III horizon – three, II horizon – one. Burial inventory is not found in Ezero settlement mound.¹⁹

Twenty six burials of infants up to one year old are mentioned in the preliminary report of the Yunatsite settlement mound excavations, but they are not published in details. As in Ezero the infants are buried in pits and urns under the floors of the dwellings or under the foundations of the hearth and ovens of the houses. There is burial inventory: ceramic vessels and necklace of animal teeth and *spondylus* in some of them²⁰.

Three burials of infants in urns from IV, III and II building horizons are found in the settlement-colony of the settlement mound in the town of Nova Zagora²¹.

A burial of infant in pit under the floor of the dwelling is found in the settlement Assara near by the town of Simeonovgrad²².

Urn with infant bones are known from the IV and III building horizons of Dyadovo settlement mound²³. Another burial of infant is found between the two plasters of an oven from IV building horizon²⁴.

An infant burial in clay vessel under the floor of the dwelling is known from III building horizon of the settlement mound Galabovo²⁵.

Five intramural burials of adults are published from Ezero site. The main characteristics of the burial practice are as follows: the burial from XIII horizon is contracted on its back, oriented with the head in South-Southwest, the burial from XII horizon is hooked on the right side, oriented in South-Southwest. The burial from XI horizon is made in a pit with the red ochre on the bottom. Two burials from X horizon are known: one contracted on the right side, oriented South-Southwest and second in hooked on the right for which the orientation is not mentioned. Only in the burial from XIII building horizon is found a

necklace of marble pendant and dentally beads. All the other burials are without grave goods²⁶.

An intramural burial of adult is also known from the second building horizon of the settlement-colony of Nova Zagora settlement²⁷.

A flat Early Bronze Age necropolis from the first stage of Ezero culture is placed on the Neolithic-Chalcolithic dated settlement mound Bereketska near Stara Zagora. The necropolis consists of seventy four graves. Most of them are with one skeleton. The inhumations are made in rectangular or oval pits. In some of them are buried two to four individuals²⁸.

Two types of skeleton positions are distinguished: first – hooked, mostly on the right side and second – contracted position on its back²⁹. The South orientation is predominating³⁰. The burial inventory, placed most frequent by the head, contains clay vessels (bowls, pots) and pieces of red ochre. Metal knife, arrowhead and necklace of seashells and animal tooth are found in three different graves³¹. The skeletons are stained with red ochre³².

Intramural burials of infants are known from Troy, Termi I and III³³. Burials of adults in the settlements are found in Kum Tepe IB and Termi III³⁴. The intramural burials from the Upper Thracian lowland and the valley of Toundza river on the one hand and the mentioned burials from the Aegean and Northwest Anatolian areas on the other hand, demonstrate the cultural interrelations between these regions.

Several burial mound necropoleis and tumuli are investigated in the valley of the river Sazlijka: Trojanovo, Kovachevo³⁵, Golyama Detelina³⁶, Mednikarovo-Iskritsa³⁷. They belong to the Pit-Grave culture and demonstrate the penetration of

¹⁹ Георгиев et al. 1979, 491.

²⁰ Катинчаров, Маданова 1993, 157.

²¹ Кънчева-Русева, Кънчев 1991, 42; Кънчева-Русева, Гоцев 1994, 30.

²² Лещаков 1992.

²³ Катинчаров et al. 1986, 42; 1987, 64.

²⁴ Катинчаров et al. 1988, 44 - 45.

²⁵ Панайотов 1991, 34 - 35.

²⁶ Георгиев et al. 1979, 491 - 493.

²⁷ Кънчева-Русева, Кънчев 1991, 42.

²⁸ Katincharov 1980, 168.

²⁹ Kalchev 1996, 216.

³⁰ Katincharov 1980, 168; Kalchev 1996, 217.

³¹ Katincharov 1980, 168; Kalchev 1996, 217.

³² Kalchev 1996, 217.

³³ Séfériadès 1985, 168 - 189.

³⁴ Séfériadès 1985, 165, 169, 177.

³⁵ Панайотов 1989, 49.

³⁶ Кънчев 1991, 41 - 70; Лещаков, Борисов 1995, 9 - 33;

Лещаков, Попова 1995, 65 - 84.

³⁷ Панайотов, Александров 1995.

this culture south of the Stara Planina Mountain into the area of the Ezero culture in the time of stage Mihalich. Grave № 1 from Gonova burial mound near by Targovishte can be related with the earliest variant of the Pit-Grave culture in the Upper Thracian lowland³⁸. The cultural interrelations between the newcomers – nomad tribes and the local population are reflected in perceiving of the local pottery used by the aliens in their burial practices³⁹.

Culture Chernavoda II (Ezerovo II) in the Bulgarian lands is spread in Northeast Bulgaria and on the Black Sea shore. The Chernavoda II (Ezerovo II) culture is synchronized with Mihalich stage of Culture Ezero (second stage of the Early Bronze Age in Bulgaria). It is possible to associate with the Chernavoda II (Ezerovo II) culture the following necropoleis and graves: Topolite, Varna district (studied by G.Toncheva; the excavations are not published), Batin⁴⁰, Rousse district, Devnya⁴¹, Varna district and Malak Preslavets⁴², Silistra district.

Eleven burials are excavated near by the Batin village. The burial pits are rectangular. Ten skeletons are in hooked on the right side and one on the left, oriented with the head on South direction, with the exception of one, oriented to the North. Burial inventory is found in five of the burials, consists of clay vessels, placed close to the head or pelvis. A piece of ochre beneath the skeleton is placed in one of the graves. The graves are dated in the Early Bronze Age by D. Stanchev on the basis of analogies with the necropolis from Zimnicha⁴³.

Four Early Bronze Age graves are found during the excavations of a Chalcolithic settlement and Early Middle Age necropolis in the neighbourhood of the town of Devnya. The deceased are buried in a contracted position (hooker) on the right side. Three of them are adults and one – infant. Only one grave construction is preserved. The pit is marked by a

row of stones and covered with one rude slab stone. The skeletons are oriented on West, Southeast, and North. The grave goods (ceramic vessels and a flint blade) are placed close to the head, in front of the breasts and near by the hands and legs. The dating of the graves, based on the pottery analogies with Ezerovo, Ezero, Mihalich, is in the first half of the Bronze Age, according to the publication of I. Ivanov⁴⁴.

Two graves with inhumation are found in the place “Gorno Gradishte” near village Malak Preslavets, Silistra district, on the Danube bank. One of the graves is described as a hooked on the right side, oriented West-East, with a ceramic cup in the right hand and clay fragments around the skeleton. The analogies of the pottery are from sites Mihalich, Sveti Kirilovo and Vesselinovo⁴⁵.

The mentioned flat burials with inhumation: Batin, Devnya and Malak Preslavets are included in different geomorfological regions in the area of Chernavoda II (Ezerovo II) culture in Northeast Bulgaria.

The settlements of the culture Coțofeni in the Bulgarian lands are situated in plains, hills and semi-mountain regions of the rivers Danube, Ogosta and Iskar. Coțofeni culture is spread to the river Ossam in East direction and to the Stara Planina Mountain in South⁴⁶. Identical cultural phenomena are characteristic for the both sides of the Danube River.

Biritality is typical for the Coțofeni culture: flat necropoleis and graves with cremation and intramural inhumations⁴⁷. A necropolis with cremation in Bulgaria is known from village Ostrov⁴⁸, Vratsa district.

The Pit-Grave culture is attested in the area of Coțofeni culture: necropoleis and graves from Tarnava, Harlets, Verbitsa, Byala Slatina, Vratsa district. The burial practices as the shape and construction of the tumuli, the pits construction,

³⁸ Кънчев 1991, 46; Панайотов 1989, 49, 56.

³⁹ Панайотов 1989, 50.

⁴⁰ Станчев 1980, 62; 1989, 7 - 12.

⁴¹ Иванов 1972, 250 - 253.

⁴² Георгиева 1952, 259 - 282.

⁴³ Станчев 1989, 9.

⁴⁴ Иванов 1972, 253.

⁴⁵ Георгиева 1952, 261.

⁴⁶ Панайотов, Александров 1988, 2.

⁴⁷ Роман 1977, 35 - 38; Панайотов, Александров 1988, 2 - 3; Панайотов 1989, 50; Александров 1994, 85; Alexandrov 1995, 257.

⁴⁸ Николов 1964, 69 - 77; Панайотов, Александров 1988, 2; Александров 1994, 85 - 86.

the position of the skeletons, the red ochre, are typical for the Pit-Grave culture⁴⁹. A vessel with corded decoration is known from Tarnava necropolis, second burial mound⁵⁰. Cremation found in Tarnava and the ceramic inventories in the graves are connected with the Coțofeni culture⁵¹.

According to I. Panayotov and L. Nikolova the distribution of the cremation is related with a Central European tradition: Baden, Boleraz - Chernavoda III, Coțofeni⁵².

St. Alexandrov distinguished two chronological groups: the first one – graves one to six from the burial mound I from Tarnava, synchronous with Coțofeni III, and the second – graves seven to ten from the same mound, the necropolis from Verbitsa and the grave from Harlets, synchronized with the period following Coțofeni III⁵³.

It is possible to conclude that in the burial practices during the Early Bronze Age in the Bulgarian lands are demonstrated specific cultural interrelations with different chronological and territorial aspects.

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⁴⁹ Панайотов, Александров 1988, 3; Панайотов 1989, 50, 57; Александров 1994, 86 - 88; Alexandrov 1995, 257.

⁵⁰ Николов 1976, 40.

⁵¹ Николов 1982, 194 - 195; Панайотов 1989, 50; Александров 1994, 87; Alexandrov 1995, 257.

⁵² Панайотов 1989, 50; Николова 1992, 8.

⁵³ Александров 1994, 86 - 88.

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Burials		Sites	No of burials	Position	Orientation	Burial inventory
Intramural burials	Infants	Ezero	11	Hooked in pits and urns - 10 Contracted on its back -1	South-Southwest West	
		Yunatsite	26	Hooked in pits and urns		- Clay vessels - Necklace of animal teeth and spondylus
		Dyadovo	3 ?	Hooked in urns and under oven		
		Nova Zagora	2 ?	Hooked in urns		
		Nova Zagora (colony)	3	Hooked in urns		
		Assara (Simeonovgrad)	1	Hooked in pit	Northwest	
		Galabovo	1	Hooked in urn		
	Adults	Ezero	5	Hooked in pits - 4 Contracted on its back -1	South - Southwest	- Necklace of marble pendant and dentalium beads - Ochre
		Nova Zagora (colony)	1	Hooked	Southwest	
Flat necropoleis		Bereket tell	74	Hooked Contracted on its back	South Southeast West Southwest Northeast North East	- Clay vessels - Necklace of sea-shells and animal tooth - 1 metal knife - 1 metal arrowhead - Ochre
		Batin	11	Hooked	South North	- Clay vessels - 1 piece of ochre
Flat burials with inhumation		Devnya	4	Hooked	West Southeast North East	- Clay vessels - Flint knife
		Malak Preslavets	2	Hooked	West	- Clay vessels
Flat burials with cremation		Ostrov	1 ?			

Fig. 1. Early Bronze Age Burials and Necropoleis in the Bulgarian Lands.