

## Ruler's Tumular Burials from the Kazanlak Region in Bulgaria

by Diana Dimitrova

The Kazanlak valley is located almost in the geometric center of Bulgaria – between the Balkan range southern slopes and the Sredna Gora Mountain northern ones. There the interest of both travelers and scholars towards various remains from the Thracian culture, mainly tumuli, is of long standing.

Some dozens of graves have been found out during excavations, carried out over the last year under the direction of G. Kitov, into more than one hundred tumuli. Seven among them might be relevant to ruler's burials – those in the following tumuli: Malkata Mogila, Ostrusha, Sashova Mogila, Leshnikova Mogila, Zareva Mogila, Sineva Mogila and Petrunova Mogila. The burials have been performed into different types of constructions: in pits (Petrunova Mogila and Sineva Mogila); on platforms situated at different levels of the embankment (Zareva Mogila and Leshnikova Mogila); into primitive rough-stone tombs (Malkata Mogila); in a tomb-mausoleum (Sashova Mogila) and in a temple dedicated to the Thracian god Sabazios (Ostrusha). The selection of the burials has been made on the basis of the existence of at least one of the following ruler's and priest's insignia – a double-axe (*labrys*), a signet-ring or a *phiale*. Both signet rings and *phialae* have always been made of precious metals (gold, silver).

The ruler's burials and the recently discovered tumular constructions gave enough grounds the Kazanlak valley to be called the Valley of the Thracian Rulers<sup>1</sup>. It is already known in the literature with this name. The monumental tumular constructions are not considered as a determinative sign for king's and priest's burials. Some of the architectural monuments have been used as tombs for rulers

and higher Odrysian aristocrats over the late stages of their utilization – before they got finally sealed with embankments<sup>2</sup>. But all of them have been *heroa* and temples, dedicated to different Thracian gods. This is proved by their impressive internal decorations and by the *dromoi* some of them had to facilitate the multiple visits.

One of the burials, specified for sure as a ruler's one, is in the Malkata Mogila, tumulus near the town of Shipka<sup>3</sup>. It is located in a primitive pebble- built tomb having a narthex and a chamber. Two bones made scepters, shaped as double-axes (*labryses*), symbols of both the king's and ruler's power in the ancient Thrace<sup>4</sup>, have been discovered among the grave goods. There are pictures of *labryses* on silver coins of Medokos from the end of the fifth century BC, of Amatokos II and Teres II from the mid fourth century BC. But as it is well known only the chieftains of the Thracian tribes and the kings had been given the right to mint coins. The two bone made *labryses* have got the shape of a double-axe with a smooth upper side and an arched lower side (pl. 1/1)<sup>5</sup>. One of them used to have a perishable material handle, wrapped in a silver band. The other has got bronze loops to be either hanged on one's neck or attached to one's cloths (pl. 1/2). These objects have been discovered together with other king's power insignia – a gold signet-ring, a gold collar, two silver *phialae*, as well as burial gifts of great artistic and scholarly value – two gold necklaces (pl. 1/3, 4), some silver chains and Thracian type silver fibulae, gold and silver round appliquéés, a bronze *situla* and a bronze bowl, some clay vessels.

---

<sup>2</sup> Димитрова 1999, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Kitov 1999a, 5; Китов 1994, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Китов 1979, 13; Бонев 1988, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Kitov 1999a, 6; Китов 1994, 72, cat. II /31, 32.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kitov 1999a, 3; Китов 1994, 59.

The signet ring (pl. 1/5) is made of massive gold and has got an elliptical plate<sup>6</sup> with two standing human figures incised on it. The scene represents an act of investiture and it is known from other compositions in Thrace<sup>7</sup> too. The left side standing goddess hands over an unclear object to the ruler as a symbol of his power. The king holds a scepter behind his back. The iconographic style of the picture on the plate is featuring to the mid fifth century BC. Taking into consideration the later dating of the other objects found in the tomb, the ring had probably been handed down from generation to generation<sup>8</sup>.

The collar (pl. 2/6) from the Malkata Mogila tumulus is made from a thin sheet of iron and has got a strongly elongated elliptical shape<sup>9</sup> and two holes to be attached to a cloth. The decoration consists of two horizontal rows of granules. The careless workmanship suggests the object had probably been produced especially for the aristocrat's burial. In principle, the collar had been among the most featuring signs of their owner's status<sup>10</sup>. Most often these items had been relevant to the funeral ritual<sup>11</sup> and for this reason some of them were not worn at all in the people's lifetime.

Fragments of gold and silver collars (pectorals) with a decoration shaped on an iron pad have been found in three tumular burials in the following tumuli within the Kazanlak region: Tsviatkova Mogila, Goliamia Arsenalka<sup>12</sup> and Shushmanets. As the fragments are too small both in size and number, the entire reconstruction of the objects is not possible. They are interpreted upon analogies from Thrace and North Greece<sup>13</sup> and suggest it is probable to find out yet other ruler's burials within the Valley.

The two silver *phialae* from the Malkata Mogila tumulus (pl. 2/7)<sup>14</sup> are close to cups with elongated necks and spherical bodies. They have got no decoration. As symbols of the king's and

the highest aristocrat's life they have a sacral meaning<sup>15</sup> too. Also they participate in the libation ritual (pouring out a liquid from a *rhyton* into a *phiale*), usually performed by the king-priest<sup>16</sup>. They were offered as gifts among rulers and high aristocrats in Thrace, which is evidenced by the inscriptions on some of them<sup>17</sup>.

The *phiale* from the Leshnikova Mogila tumulus (pl. 2/8) (Kazanlak region near Shipka)<sup>18</sup> is an example for such *phialae* with an inscription. It has been discovered in a primitive grave together with silver, bronze and clay vessels and an iron horse bit. The *phiale* has got an archaic shape and a decoration with strongly elongated leaves, produced in relief and terminated with an Ionic cyma. An inscription, including two Thracian names – those of a father and son – “Dyuntas son of Zeilas”<sup>19</sup>, is produced on the external side around the umbo. It is not possible to exclude the probability that the *phiale* found in the primitive built grave, dating back to the end of the fifth century BC, was a military or other trophy.

A silver *phiale*<sup>20</sup>, accompanied by pottery and weapons, has been excavated in a tumular grave with a human and a horse inhumation in the Zareva Mogila tumulus. The *phiale* has got an hemispherical shape and its body is decorated with incised lines, the arrangement of which reminds surprisingly a modern football ball. An ivy leaf, one of the symbols of the Thracian god Dionysos, is incised on its external side. The item is dated from the end of the fifth century BC.

The silver *phialae* from the Petrunova Mogila tumulus (near the town of Maglizh) and the Ostrusha tumulus (near Shipka) are fragmented. They have got the same shapes, consisting in a large bowl with an umbo in the center, and are decorated with radial flutings.

The *phiale* from the Sashova Mogila tumulus (pl. 2/9)<sup>21</sup> (close to the village of Iassenovo) has been discovered in a great and not plundered

<sup>6</sup> Kitov 1999a, 6; Китов 1994, 52, cat. II/ 10.

<sup>7</sup> Филов 1916 - 1918, 3; Чичикова 1983, 20ff.

<sup>8</sup> Kitov 1999a, 6; Китов 1994, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Китов 1994, 67, cat. II/ 9.

<sup>10</sup> Димитров 1949, 234 - 235; Гинев 1983, 23ff.

<sup>11</sup> Филов 1932-1933, 230 - 232; Кръстева 1985, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Китов 1996c, 40.

<sup>13</sup> Faklaris 1991, 1 - 17 (in Greek).

<sup>14</sup> Китов 1994, 53, 70, cat. II/ 21, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Marazov 1989, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Горбановв 1991, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Венедиков 1972, 1 - 7.

<sup>18</sup> Китов 1996a, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Dimitrov 1995, 11; Theodossiev 1997, 174; Kitov 1999a, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Китов 1999b, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Китов 1996a, 51; Китов 1996b, 16.

Thracian tomb-mausoleum together with a gold fibula, a bronze jug, a Thracian type bronze helmet, a sword, a chain-armour, clay vessels and other weapons. In the discoverer's opinion the *phiale* is a masterpiece of the late Thracian art and marks the transition from the classical *phialae* to the bowls from Sindel and Iakimovo in North Bulgaria. The inner side of the vessel is decorated with three concentric and gold-plated belts with different patterns and a twelve-beam gold-plated rosette on the bottom. The middle belt is the most important as far as the dating of the item is concerned. The *phiale* is of the mid second century BC date, based on its large rectangular fields, filled in with laurel leaves and incised lines, crossing themselves at right angles. This decoration resembles the one on some *phalerae* from Ivailovgrad region and a silver headpiece from Ravnogor<sup>22</sup> in the Rhodope Mountains.

An finally, I would like to pay special attention to the gold signet-ring from the Sineva Mogila tumulus (pl. 2/10) close to Shipka<sup>23</sup> as I think it is of particular importance for the interpretation of the Thracian religion. The following are pictured on its plate: a cluster of grapes, a tortoise and a griffin's head. The pictures are precise and the lines are well seen, which proves the ring had not been worn for a long time. Taking into consideration the iconography it is dated from the mid fourth century BC. This dating is well supported by the other grave goods – a Thracian bronze helmet, a silver decoration set from a horse trapping, pottery and weapons. The cluster of grapes is the symbol of the fertility of the Great Mother Goddess as well as an attribute of the Thracian god Dionysos. The tortoise is the symbol of the ruler's long life and the solar aspect of the Thracian Dionysos – Sabazios<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, it shows the king is a son of the Sun and has got its protection. The griffin is the symbol of the ruler's personal qualities – strength, quickness, power, cunning, intellect, knowledge and authority. The ruler had inherited these qualities from all animals, whose summarized image is the griffin.

The king-priest, being a son of the Great Mother Goddess and the Sun and being a half-god, had inherited the required qualities from his divine parents to rule his people, to protect it from external enemies, as well as to increase both the fertility of the earth and the territories inhabited by his subjects. All this world is strongly organized by canons regulating the behavior roles of each class and even of each individual. The canons are summarized in the Thracian Orphism doctrine, symbolized by the elliptical plate of the ring. No one is allowed to breach the canons and to go out of them in the every day life. The ring from the Sineva Mogila tumulus is both a message and a reminder of the ruler's divine origin and strength, meant for the ordinary Thracians and the enemies as well as for the aristocrats from the ruler's entourage.

The seven ruler's burials are dated from the end of the fifth to the mid second centuries BC, some of the attributes having an earlier dating (the ring from the Malkata Mogila tumulus). As it is hardly probable that such number of Thracian kings had been buried over such a short period on a relatively limited territory, I take the liberty to presume that higher aristocrats had been buried there, too. I dare say they had been gifted with some king's attributes for special merits in their lifetime (e.g. a *phiale*) and lately these object were rested in their graves as grave goods. Taking into consideration that only part of the tumuli in the Kazanlak valley have been excavated, in the future it is much probable to find more double-axes, signet-rings, *phialae*, collars, probably wreaths, and – why not – *rhytons*<sup>25</sup>, indisputable ruler's insignia, known from both written and archaeological sources from all over the Thrace.

**Diana Dimitrova**  
Institute of Archaeology with Museum  
Bulgarian Academy of Science  
"Lagera", Bl. 49 A, apt. 5  
1612, Sofia  
BULGARIA

<sup>22</sup> Китов 1989, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Китов 1996а, 66; Kitov 1997, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Фол 1994, 257.

<sup>25</sup> Луконин 1977, 36.

## Bibliography

- DIMITROV, P. 1995, *Deux noms nouveaux d'aristocrates thraces dans une inscription de Kazanluk*, Orpheus 5.
- FAKLARIS, P. 1991, *Peritrachelion*, A.D. 40, Athens, (in Greek).
- KITOV, G. 1997, *Tombs Monumentales Thraces*, Archeologia 338, Dijon.
- KITOV, G. 1999a, *Royal Insignia, Tombs and Temples in the Valley of the Thracian Rulers*. ArchBulg 1.
- MARAZOV, I. 1989, *The Gifts of the Odrysian Kings*, in *The Rogozen Treasure*, Sofia.
- THEODOSSIEV, N. 1997, *A new Early Thracian Inscription from Bulgaria*, Kadmos 36.
- БОНЕВ, А. 1988, *Тракия и Егейския свят през втората половина на II хилядолетие пр. н. е.*, РП 20.
- ВЕНЕДИКОВ, И. 1972, *Надписите върху тракийските фиали*, Археология 14, 2.
- ГИНЕВ, Г. 1983, *Съкровището от Кралево*, София.
- ГОРБАНОВВ, П. 1991, *Ритонизирани амфори като атрибути на тракийските царежреци при ритуала "либацио" (тези и хипотези)*, Балкански древности, 1.
- ДИМИТРОВ, Д. 1949, *Тракийска гробна находка от с. Дълбоки, Старозагорско*, РП 4.
- ДИМИТРОВА, Д. 1999, *Религиозната доктрина в архитектурни паметници от Балканите и Мала Азия (VI - II в. Пр. Хр.)*, - Старини 2.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1979, *Тракийски символични секири и амулети с изображения на животни*, Археология 21, 2.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1989, *Куполните гробници при Равногор в Родопите*, Археология 31, 3.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1994, *Долината на царете в Казанлъшката котловина*, Анали 2-3.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1996a, *Нови открития в Долината на царете*, Анали, 1-4.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1996b, *Сашова могила (Монумен-тална неограбена тракийска гробница между Шипка и Ясеново)*, Археология 38, 2-3.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1996c, *Могилата Голяма Арсеналка*, Археология, 38, 4.
- КИТОВ, Г. 1999b, *Царската долина на траките в Казанлъшко*, in *Казанлък в миналото и днес*, Стара Загора, 5.
- КРЪСТЕВА, М. 1985, *Тракийски нагръдници (V - IV в. пр. Хр.) от Североизточна България*, in *Североизточна България - древност и съвремие*. Институтъ София.
- ЛУКОНИН, В. 1977, *Искусство древнего Ирана*, Москва.
- ФОЛ, А. 1994, *Тракийският Дионис II. Сабазий*, София.
- ФИЛОВ, Б. 1916 - 1918, *Паметници на тракийското изкуство*, ИБАИ 6.
- ФИЛОВ, Б. 1932 - 1933, *Новооткрити тракийски гробници от Дуванлий*, ИБАИ 7.
- ЧИЧИКОВА, М. 1983, *Гробницата от Свещари*, Изкуство 33, 4.



1



2



3



4



5

Pl. 1. 1 - 2. Labrys from Malkata Mogila (Photo G. Kitov); 3 - 4. Gold necklace from Malkata Mogila (Photo G. Dimov); 5. Gold seal ring Malkata Mogila (Photo G. Dimov).



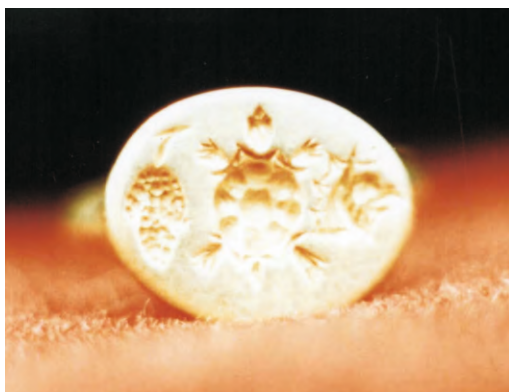
6



8



7



10



9

Pl. 2. 6. Collar from Malkata Mogila (Photo G. Kitov); 7. Silver *phiale* from Malkata Mogila (Photo G. Kitov); 8 Silver *phiale* from Leshnikova Mogila (Photo G. Kitov); 9. Silver *phiale* from Sashova Mogila (Photo G. Kitov); 10. Gold seal ring from Sineva Mogila (Photo G. Kitov).