

RARE DESIGN OF GRAVES ON OLBIO NECROPOLIS

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Graves construction was one of the most important and stable elements of the funeral rite in the archaic time. The burial construction represented a closed space around the dead body and was a sort of a house for the latter¹.

The burial in the underground constructions symbolized rebirth after death as the ancient people considered the ground to be a “reproduction womb” (Eur, Suppl., 532)². Round shaped and stone burial constructions embodied both houses and temples in the ancient Greeks’ beliefs³.

The burial construction represented stationary, closed space (chamber) created to host a dead body or its remains⁴.

Olbio Necropolis is known for three types of burial constructions - pit graves, recess graves and charnel houses (ground and stone).

Pit graves are an archaic type of burial constructions. The shape of those graves hadn’t been changed for almost a thousand years of Olbio Necropolis’ existence. In most cases, it is a rectangular pit with rounded corners. Some pits used to have additional elements, such as coated walls and floors.

All Olbio’s pit graves used to have slab floors made of wood, stone, adobe blocks or their combination. The soil had never been put directly on the coffin, sarcophagus or a dead body. There was a little space left for the deceased⁵, as ancient Greeks believed that they buried not only a dead body but a living soul. After the interment, relatives called the soul three times by the name, wished a happy life under the ground and said “be happy” thrice. The speech was concluded with the words “may the ground be light for you”⁶.

Amphorae used to be the cover for the graves as well, but it was a rare case. Only one grave of such kind (1905/27) is known. It dated back to 5th century B.C.⁷ (Fig.1).

In the 90s the archeologists discovered two pit graves of the unknown construction dated back to 2nd century B.C. The floor of the graves was specially covered with square and rectangular limestone plates (Fig.2-3). Those graves evidently had a wood cover that is proved by some small fragments of wood in the grave. In the grave 1994/1 a wood board was placed on special stone legs in the corners of the pit. Constructional design of the grave 2000/7 was different. There were special holes for wood stakes made in the stone floor to support the covering of the grave. The wood bulkhead was covered with the ground consisting of small stones and ceramic fragments. Funeral accessories in the graves are not substantial as the graves had been destroyed by the tomb robbers. In grave 1994/1 the archeologists found a part of an iron knife, bronze covering of the wooden scabbard, a large blue glass bead with white eyes, a fragment of two-handled askos (Fig.4) and a bronze coin. The coin is a copy of hemigrachma.

¹ Olkhovsky V.S. 1991.

² Mironov 1895, 81; Papanova 2006, 79.

³ Latyshev 1899, 245.

⁴ Smirnov 1997, 214.

⁵ Pharmakovsky 1903, 19.

⁶ Kulange Fustel de 1906, 101.

⁷ Pharmakovsky 1908, 1-35; Papanova 2005,221-237.

There was a print of the head of Demeter the Goddess on its obverse, but the print was covered with another embossing, the horses with letters OΛ below. The reverse of the coin is a fuzzy print of a full face of Helios the God and letters ΛBI (Fig.5).

This type of the coins is dated back to the last decade of the 2nd century B.C.⁸. The coin helps to define the date of the grave construction, the end of the 2nd century B.C. A bronze button was also found in the grave 2000/7. Taking into consideration similar construction of the graves we can date them back to the same time⁹.

It should be also mentioned that additional design of the pit graves was used to imitate the house of the dead as a house for living. Only averagely rich inhabitants of the city could allow pit graves with additional design elements. But this statement is not undeniable, as the ancient Greeks did not always follow the compliance with their income and expenses for funeral and burial rites.

At the turn of the 5th -6th centuries B.C. a new type of burial construction appeared on Olbio Necropolis. It is a charnel house. It existed until the 3rd century B.C. inclusively. Olbio Necropolis is famous for ground and stone charnel houses.

The ground charnel houses are burial constructions of a complicated design. A chamber was cut in the mainland. A corridor (dromos) with vertical or inclined walls led to the chamber.

A charnel house of an unusual design was discovered in 1993. All charnel houses which had been excavated earlier used to have inclined stepped dromoses and chambers of square, rectangular, trapezoid or round shape with an arch entrance. Charnel house 1993/1 had a principally new design (Fig.6). Its dromos represented a deep (3-4 meters) entrance with inclined walls. There were narrow cornices on the south-west and south-east walls. The dromos was covered with a mixture of yellow clay and ground, and also fragments of amphorae and small stones. There was a layer of rubble on the upper cover of the dromos. The pyriform chamber of the charnel house used to have rounded corners (0,86-1,33 x 1,87 x 0,73 - 0,82 m) oriented to the line northwest-southeast. The chamber was located in the northwest part of the dromos. The entrance was arch shaped, divided into two parts by a ground column (0,34 - 0,48 x 0,56 - 0,59 m). The arches had different height and width. Burial accessories are poorly represented as depredation took place. There were strongly damaged human bones, pieces of iron nails, astragalus with a trace of copper oxide, a Black Sea shell with the trace of copper and iron oxide, two fragments of grey clay bowl with turned up brim dated back to 5th century B.C. The north part of the charnel house had the print of the coffin's board (0,6 x 0,37 m).

Apparently, the charnel house was constructed at the end of the 5th – the beginning of the 4th century B.C. The date is proved by the fact that it is located on the area with burials dated back to the second quarter of the 5th-4th centuries B.C. Besides, the fragments of the grey clay bowl dated back to the 5th century B.C. were found in the grave. The grave represented the transition from a pit grave to a charnel house. It is proved by the fragments of a grey clay bowl dated back to the 5th century B.C. and pit graves dated back to the beginning of the 4th century B.C. that were the transition from large pit graves to the charnel houses¹⁰.

Thus, charnel houses dated back to the turn of the 5th – 4th centuries appeared first, then stone crypts appeared in the second half of the 4th century B.C. This is one of Olbio Necropolis' peculiarities, unlike stone crypts appeared first in the 4th century B.C. on the other graveyards of the antique cities of the north pre-Black Sea regions¹¹.

The type and kind of burial constructions depended on a number of circumstances. Firstly, on religious beliefs of relatives of a deceased person. Secondly, on economic

⁸ Zograph 1961, 135, Table XXXIV,14.

⁹ Papanova 2001, 38.

¹⁰ Papanova 2006, 86.

¹¹ Tsvetayeva 195, 169-70,73.

development of the city (polis) in a given historic period. Thirdly, on the natural environment and necessary construction materials.

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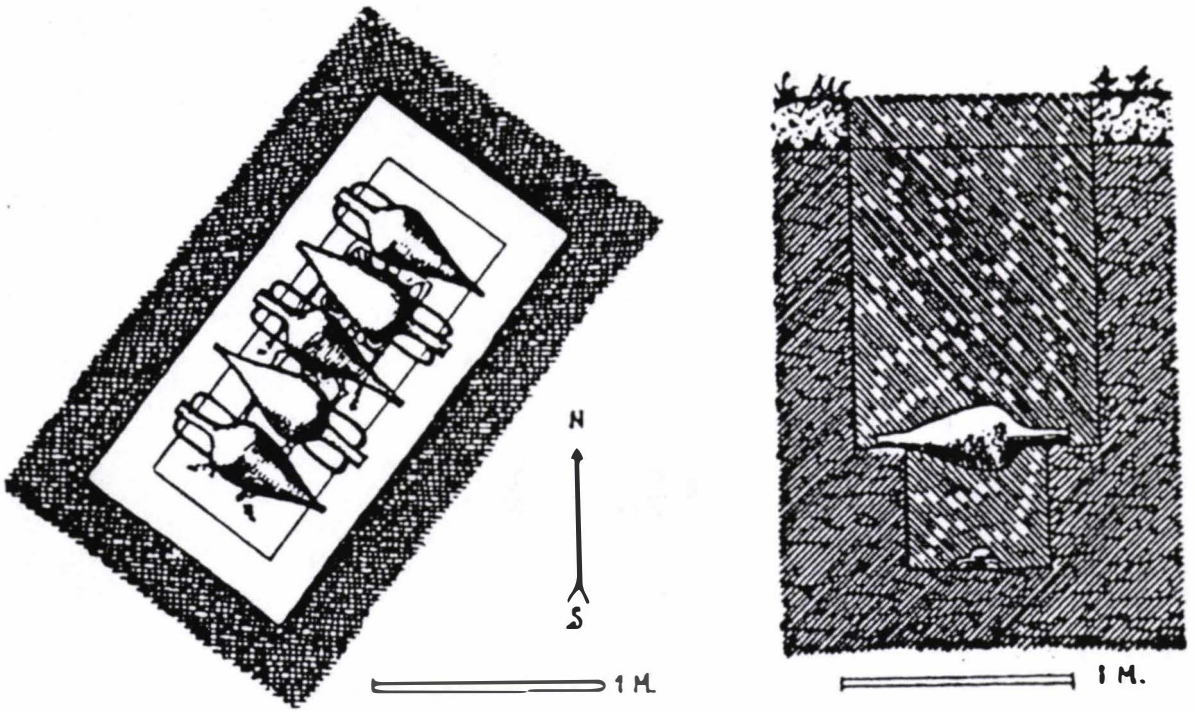
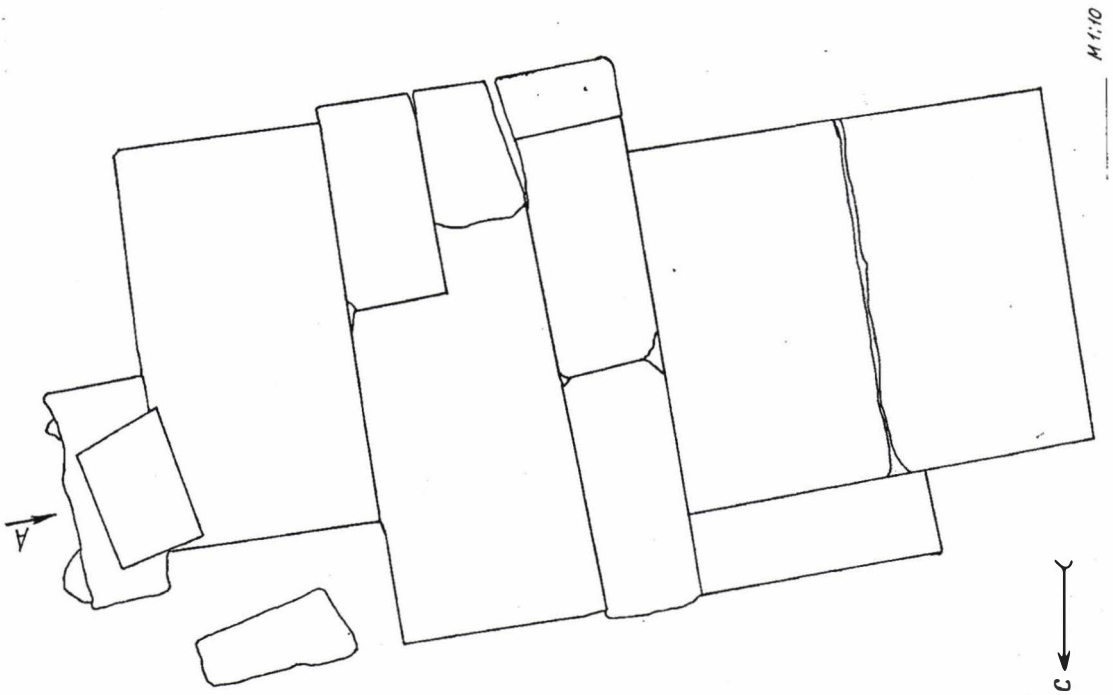


Fig.1. Amphorae used to be the cover for the graves as well 1905/27 to 5th century B.C.



a



b

Fig.2. Grave 1994/1 to 2nd century B.C. (a - ; b - foto)

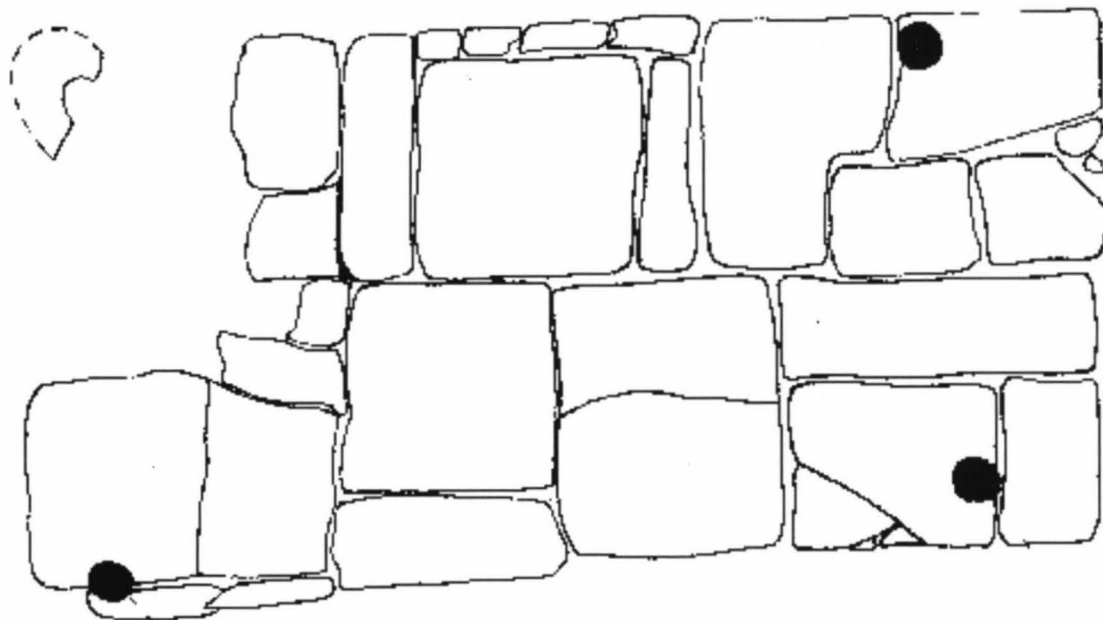


Fig.3. Grave 2000/7 to 2nd century B.C.

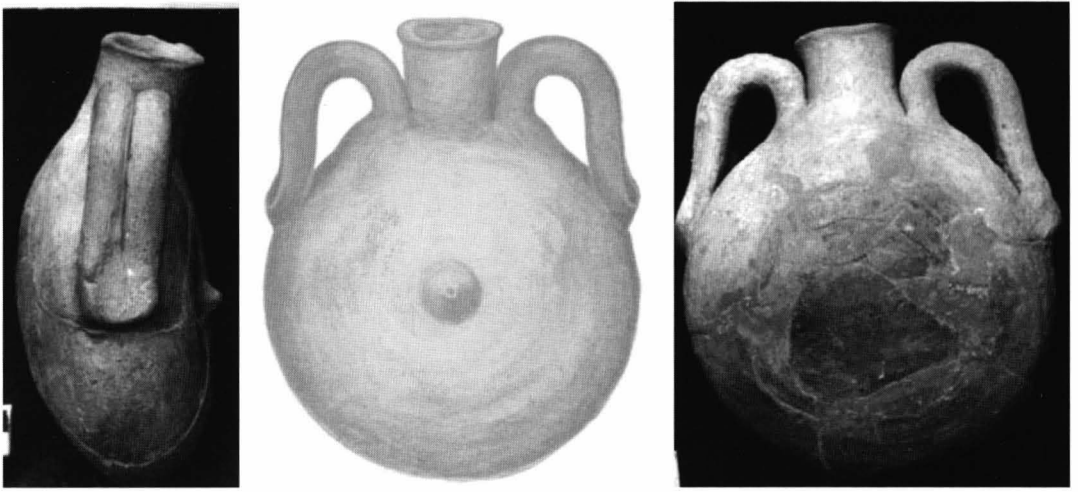


Fig.4. The two-handled askos (grave 1994/1)

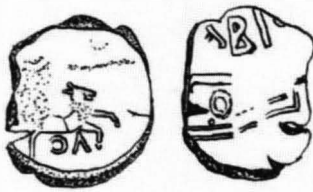
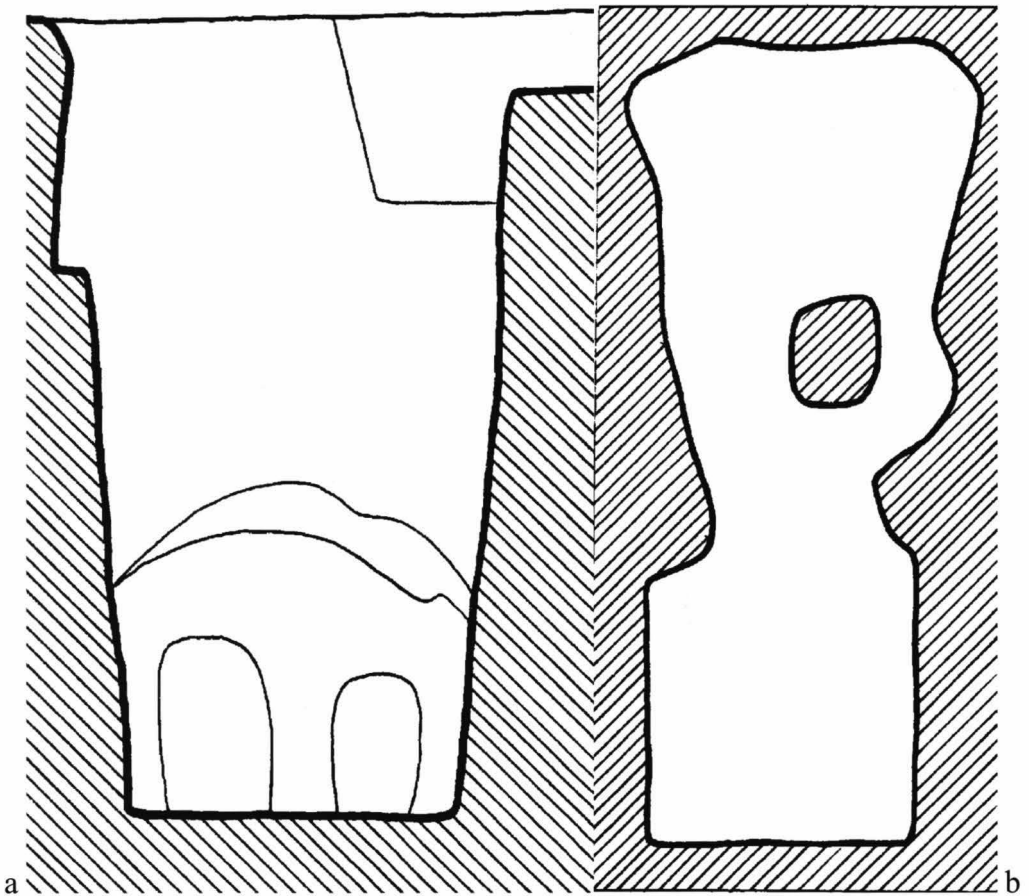


Fig.5. The bronze coin to 2nd century B.C. (grave 1994/1)



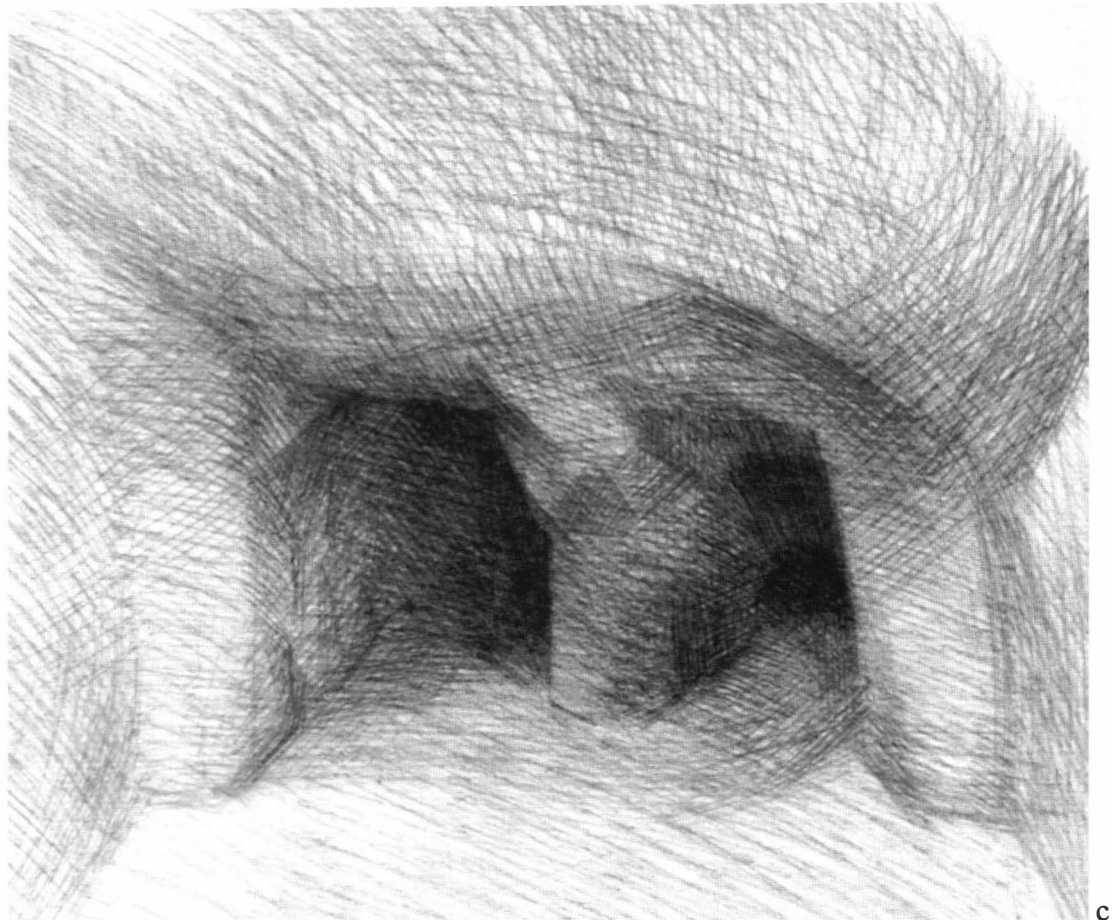


Fig.6. Charnel house 1993/1 of the 5th – 4th centuries B.C.
(a – dromos, b- chamber, c – entrance)