

# SACRIFICING “AFTER THE ANCESTRAL CUSTOM”.

## An attempt at reconsidering the Thracian pit sanctuaries

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The problems related to the ritual practices in the so-called pit sanctuaries in the West Pontic region and to those in the mainland, are far not new. The increasing interest in their interpretation has been provoked by several newly excavated sites and by generalized studies in the Bulgarian and in the Romanian literature as well (Георгиева 1991, p. 1-11; Паунов 1998, p. 7-13; Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 164-183; Балабанов 2002, p. 241-542; Vulcheva 2002, p. 103-125; Tonkova 2003, p. 479-504; Тонкова 2005, p. 67-73; Tonkova 2005; last in Sirbu 2006). The profound study on the matter made so far provided undoubtedly a good factual database for further debates and hypotheses.

The outgoing point of this essay represents one particular case – that of the pit sanctuary by Debelt, located in the southern littoral of the Western Pontos. Its chronological position in the 7<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. and the main characteristics of the pits – such as spatial organization, shape, construction and filling show certain uniformities with the contemporary or earlier complexes in the Thracian mainland (Георгиева 1991, p. 1-11; Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 170-173; Балабанов 2002, p. 241-542; Vulcheva 2002, p. 103-125; Tonkova 2003, p. 479-499; Тонкова 2005, p. 67-73) (**Fig. 1**).

The synchronous appearance of the so-called pit-fields, their distribution area and the typological similarities, are the common criteria for considering them as a Thracian phenomenon (last in Oppermann 2004, p. 31, 34, 94). Other group of authors is reasonably moderate to such concept specifying the existence of parallels in different regions of the ancient world – Greece, Central Europe etc. (Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 174; Балабанов 2002, p. 544-545; Vulcheva 2002, p. 103-125; Tonkova 2003, p. 483).

However, the main point of difference between the pits in the Thracian inlands and in Debelt is the material found in their filling – the latter often representing Greek imported ware, which earliest date - the late 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. coincides with the establishment of the neighbor Greek settlement Apollonia Pontica (**Fig.2**). Hence the general structure of the pits and the rituals observed there enhances a principal comparison with the ritual practice performed in *bothroi* in the sanctuaries of some Greek colonies as these in Odessos, Histria and Olbia (Тончева 1967, p.157 ff; last in Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 171). The function of the pit structures (*bothroi*) attested there has been considered recently as “serving probably for burying the items of ritual furnishing and apparatus no longer in use” (Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 170, 174 with references; last in Rusyayeva 2003, p. 110).

Although it seems that this statement requires more detailed study of each particular case. The reason for that are the scholars' arguments for the close relationship of the *bothroi* in some Greek sanctuaries with the worship of Aesclepius, or of chthonic deities and/or heroes (Ekroth 1998, p. 120-127; Riethmüller 1999, p. 123-143; Riethmüller 2001; Morris et al. 2002).

Further on the similarities in the shape, filling and stratigraphy of the pits either in the Thracian lands or in the Greek mainland (for the pit structures in the Greek world compare in Ekroth 1998, p. 120-127; Morris et al. 2002 *passim*) provides a firm base for establishing at least a formal connection between the ritual actions performed there.

Judging from this point of view, the general difference between *bothroi* in Greek sanctuaries and the pit structures in the periphery of the Greek world should be searched in the main principles of organization of the sacred space, according to which the former were organized after a “classical” pattern. Although the exploit of this view could be a misleading outgoing point for examine the question, because the formal criteria for distinguishing them lie either in the presence or absence of cult buildings – temples, *temenos* wall, altar etc., the latter appearing sometimes in the Thracian pit sanctuaries as well.

In the archaeological complex in “Kostadin cheshma” in Debelt, a round rock-cut structure with charcoal traces around it, rectangular ashlar platforms, a ritual ditch and ceramic fragments around the pits were documented (Балабанов 1999, p. 69-71). Similar situation was observed also in the area of Drama, Yambol region – in the so called Early Iron Age structure B in the place Kairyaka, which represents an ellipsoidal stone ring around a circular stone pavement (Лихардус et al. 2001 p. 136-137, fig. 47) (**Fig. 3**). In the recently explored “pit fields” from the Early Iron Age to 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Polski Gradets by Radnevo and Malko Tarnovo by Chirpan (both located to the south of Haemus mountain), several stone altars imposing in their sizes and horseshoe-shaped cult ditches with stone platforms around the pits were reported (Ников 2005, p. 67; Гонкова, Димитров 2005, p. 75-76).

It is however very speculative to state, that the structures described above represent a specific Thracian phenomenon. One of the reasons is the above mentioned similarities with contemporary, earlier or later complexes within the ancient world, among which the recently reported archaeological structures in the Acropolis of Monte Polizzo, near Agrigento in Sicily evokes special interest (**Fig. 4**). Concerning the origin of the phenomenon, the conclusions of the excavators based on a large scale observations is, that “The dates suggest that of round chthonic shrines with pits were transmitted from one culture to another, the most plausible direction is from Sicily to the Aegean. The most plausible scenario is that Greek settlers adopted some indigenous religious activities, but adopted them to their own purposes, including (but not restricted to) chthonic cult. Agrigento may have been the major point of interaction” (Morris et al. 2002, p. 56).

Taking into consideration the case of the Thracian pit sanctuaries, which location points approximately the main contact directions along the river valleys in the time predating the Greek colonization and later – (see **Fig. 1**), it is reasonable to state that there were several points of interaction where the Greek settlers probably adopted similar type of riteness. Thus far the consistent development of the latter throughout the whole Roman age in Thrace can be qualified as a phenomenon of the diachronic development of the society.

The hypothesis enhances the search for further typological and essential similarities between the *bothroi* in the Greek temples and the so-called pit fields in Thrace. One of them is the existence of simple altar-like structures, attested in several Thracian pit-complexes. The same characteristic has been observed in many Greek sanctuaries from the archaic and earlier periods as well. As a matter of fact the later divergence between the construction and arrangement of both was obviously determined by the general ideological trends of the polis’ elaboration from one side, and by the conservatism of the non-polis society from the other (Фол В. 2006, p. 30-31).

The next point of resemblance is the ritual itself and the sacrificial practices performed in pits. The analysis of the bone remains outlines following picture:

1. According to the observations, the majority of bone deposits represent the practice to store only particular parts of the victims (Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 177; Балабанов 2002, p. 542; for analyses see Tonkova 2003). In some of the cases a culinary treatment is detected (Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 177; Tonkova 2003, p. 487). The combination of the latter with finds of vegetable origin, broken vessels etc. makes possible to suggest that we are dealing here with some kind of sacrifice analogous to the well-known archaic and classical Greek *thysia*.

The basic elements of the latter include the slaughter of the victim on the altar, strewn by grains, collecting the blood in a vessel and libation, followed by common dining of the worshippers (Jameson 1994,35; Scullion 2000, 163-171; Ekroth 2000, p. 267 – 268; Gebauer 2002, p. 255). More rarely this practice was completely replaced by holocaust, but as a rule the god's portion was only a part of the victim destroyed by burning (Jameson 1994, p. 35; Gebauer 2002, p. 255-256). The rest was usually consumed by the worshippers, which may represent the most plausible explanation of the bones with culinary treatment in the Thracian pit sanctuaries. This basic conclusion gives rise to the hypothesis that some of the ceramic fragments – of those particular shapes designed for eating and drinking could be interpreted as feasting traces.

2. The second possible interpretation deals with the cases when the ritual could be modified by a *theoxenia* element, i.e. by offering of the prepared food to the gods. As far as the *theoxenia* ritual was accompanied usually by meat and fruit offerings (Jameson 1994, p. 35 – 57), the vegetable remains and the intact vessels such as amphorae etc. point probably at similar practice.

The third case is that of the large bone deposits, attested in Drama (Лихардус и др. 2001, p. 143) and in the periphery of one tumulus in Istria (Alexandrescu, Evtimie 1959, p. 143 – 164; Alexandrescu 1966, p. 409 – 422). This special phenomenon could be probably considered in relationship with the so-called bone-altars made of skulls, horns and/or of the thighs of the victims, known from the literary description of the famous altar of Apollo at Delos and from the archaeologically attested practice at Didyma, Samos and Ephesos (Hägg 1998, p. 53-54; Chenal-Velarde, Studer 2003, p. 215 – 220).

3. The next point concerns the practice of depositing whole animals. It represents a type of relatively rare ritual action in case of the pit-sanctuaries, but on the other hand it was attested more often in funeral context. The common victims are horse, sheep, he-goat, ram, dog and cat in one case – the latter attested in a pit in Debelt sanctuary (Балабанов 1999, p. 69, 72, 74). This practice, as I would suggest resembles the *sphagia* ritual, which is also well known from the written sources since the Linear B tablets (Palaima 2004, p. 225). The features distinguishing it from the more regular *thysia* are the special treatment of the victim and the prominence of the blood offering. At this kind of sacrifice no altar was used, no fire was lit; the animal was simply killed and the blood flowed on the ground or into a *bothros* (Ekroth 2000, p. 269 – 271; Gebauer 2002, p. 255-256; 280-281 with references).

According to the widely spread opinion, this type of ritual action seems to have been performed on the battlefield (Ekroth 2000, p. 276-279), or in connection with the most sacramental rituals, such as purification and/or oaths (Gebauer 2002, p. 255). At this point it could be probably compared to the significance of the human sacrifice, which represents also an extreme case of sacrificial practice (Тонкова 2005, p. 70). The examples of that type were attested in Debelt, Gledachevo, Malko Tarnovo, Chirpan region, Drama, Durankulak (last in Тонкова 2005, p. 70-71 with literature) and in some complexes north of the Danube river, which are later in date (last in Sirbu 2006, p. 59 with references). As it has been confirmed by

the written sources, the human sacrifice was quite not unusual for ancient Thrace (for literary evidences see in Попов 1989, p. 55-67 with references) and – as the archaeologically attested examples from the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. onwards show, it can be regarded also as a diachronic practice compared with the literary known instances from Hellas itself (for discussion on the human sacrifice see Heinrichs 1981, p.195 – 242; Hughes 1991; Brown 1991; Antonacio 1995; Φοιτ Β. 2006, p. 116, 151-153).

Despite of the uncertainty of the comparison between literary narratives and archaeological situations, it is clear that the main component of the ritual practice – the pit, testifies to the prominence of blood and/or libation sacrifices, which are well attested in the rituals of several chthonic deities and/or heroes, as in the literary known instances of Agamedes at the Trophonios oracle in Lebadeia, in the Athenian Erechtheion etc. (for further examples see Ekroth 2000, p. 274 - 275) (Fig. 5). This association requires several points of consideration.

The one deals with the old-Greek term covering the meaning of the blood sacrifice - *εναγίζειν, καταγίζειν*, translated as “to be part of the pollution” (Power, Nagy 1999, p. 451), or similarly as “to absorb the victim and/or its blood” as an instrument for achieving the sacred purity (LSJ s.v.; for further interpretation see in Φοιτ 2002, p. 286). According to the commonly accepted view based on the analysis of the terminology of the ancient written records, the term use to designate the rituals associated with chthonic deities or heroes (see in Лазова 2000, p. 139; the relation to the human sacrifices see in Yanakieva 2005 with references), as distinct to the verb *θύειν* applied to the Olympian sacrifice. As far as in the pit sanctuaries and also in the archaeological material from Hellas the existence of both ritual categories - *thysia* and *sphagia* is attested, the literary declared difference between Olympian and a non-Olympian rite evokes certain embarrassments.

The inconsistent information given by the written and the archaeological records was convincingly elucidated in the recent studies on the problem. The main point of the authors is that the sharp distinction between Olympic and chthonic gods (i.e. the ritual complexes and the ritual equipment) did not always exist at least until the post-Classical period (for detailed analysis see Ekroth 1998, p. 129-213; Scullion 2000, p. 163-171; Ekroth 2002, p. 23-128, 129-213). In summary, the author provides a useful critical review of the terms and definitions connected with Greek hero-cults and attempts to refute the traditional assumption that different rituals separated the heavenly gods from the heroes/chthonic gods and shows convincingly that the main ritual for both groups is the *thysia* sacrifice followed by dining (Ekroth 1998, 117-129; Ekroth 2000, p. 263-279; on the hero-cults see last in Antonacio 1995; Decoudi 1999; Fol V. 2005).

An additional explanation gives the text of the sacred law from Selinous prescribing annual sacrifices to a series of supernatural figures – Zeus Eumenes, the Eumenides, Zeus Meilichios and the *Tritopatores* in connection to the Kotytia festival (Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993). The latter are first described as “polluted” and the procedure is explicitly “as for heroes”, which includes libation down through a roof of the hypogeum, i.e. from the top into the ground. Next it comes the procedure of burning of the ninth part of the animal, the rest of which was probably dined on. After that there follows a sacrifice of a full-grown sheep, accompanied by libation of honey mixture and by olive, fruit and meat offerings - this time to the “pure Tritopatores” as to the gods (A 13 – 17).

The text evokes special interest in two points.

The first one concerns the nature of the so-called collective ancestors, which name has been recognized as early as in Linear B tablets (Decoudi 1993, p. 3, nn 7-8; Φοιτ 2004, p. 151).

The later literary elaborated concept describes them as “the first-born offspring of Uranus and Gaia” or as souls bearing winds (after Φοι 2004, p. 150-151 with analysis of the written records). Summing up, the perception of the primordial ancestral spirits could be considered as similar to the concept of the relict or historical personalities– the heroes, whose divine or semi-divine nature have been ritually or literally mythologized in the course of the ideological development of the Greek polis (Antonaccio 1995, p. 267-268; Hall 2002, p. 93-98). Similar process is evident in the literary treatment of a range of the Thracian mythological figures - the king-heroes, prophets and *anthropodaimones* Rhesos, Orpheus etc. (Fol V. 2005). The basic trends of the creation and development of such type of images and ritual practices originate probably in the Mycenaean past, but they are also evident within some later archaeological complexes in Thrace. Thereby hangs also the introduction of the term “Mycenaean Thrace” as a designation of the long-living and vivid “Mycenaean” tradition and ritual practice in Thrace (Φολ 1998, p. 107-118; Φολ Β. 2003, p. 238-241; Fol V. 2005).

However the search of complete coherence of the literary narratives and the archaeologically attested situations seems to be more or less tricky matter. This approach has much in common with the contextual archaeology promulgated by I. Hodder (Hodder 1987, p.10) and followed in some extent by C. Antonaccio, who argues that “the contextual approach opens new possibilities of understanding meaning by emphasizing the context of ritual action and its traces in the material record. Context includes regional variation and similarities, offerings and actions made in a variety of circumstances, preserved written sources and historical frameworks” (Antonaccio 1995, p. 9).

Exploring the confrontation between written records of epic and/or of mythological hero worship and the material traces of ritual activity at different localities in Greece, the author has demonstrated the rarity of hero cult before the archaic period. On the other hand there is a clear “concern for extended rituals connected with the dead and a great deal of evidence considering drinking and feasting as an important social institution in the Iron Age” (Antonaccio 1995, p. 197). Further examination of the question leads to the conclusion of certain continuity of the practice for reusing or placing offerings in the Mycenaean tombs as manifestation either of a type of local hero-cults or as ancestral worship with the most prominent example in the “aristocratic” tomb of Lefkandi (Antonaccio 1995, p. 199-220).

The next important point in this connection is that the tomb cult, especially when seen as a manifestation of hero cult has been connected most probably with the “loss of the stable power structure” and thus far intended to establish a connection with the ancient inhabitants and to avert the anger of the anonymous power in the land (Antonaccio 1995, pp. 6-7 with references). Following this general trend of the studies and the information given by the archaeological and written evidences of all three categories – tomb –, hero cult and ancestors’ worship, one of the most plausible suggestions concerns the process of their literary convergence. In addition the latter is explicitly attested in the case of the three-sided complexes in Eretria, on the Athenian Agora and of the Archegeion on Delos, considered either as heroöns or as cult places of the collective ancestors – the *Tritopatores* (see in Antonaccio 1995, p. 263 ff; Ekroth 1998, p. 119). This convergence is also evident in the text of Selinous’ sacred law prescribing sacrifices to the Tritopatores, which are the same “as for the heroes” (A 9, after Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993).

Taking this into consideration and in the light of the above argued absence of clear difference between the Olympic and chthonian sacrifice (see last in Ekroth 2000, 263-279), there is no reason to consider the meaning of *καταγίζειν* and *θύειν* as defining the “marked and “unmarked sacrifices” (for further comments see Scullion 2000, 164-165, supra 4). The

most plausible interpretation seems to be in the concept that both verbs are intended to designate the sequence of the ritual action as they were described for instance in Selinous' text – first to perform the purification of the “polluted Tritopatores” (*katagidsein*), after which there follows the sacrifice to the “pure Tritopatores ... as to the gods (*thuein*) (A 13 – 17).

The type and the sequence of these ritual actions give one more point of comparison with the rituals in the Thracian pit sanctuaries. The most plausible reconstruction based on the sacred law of Selinous and on the interpretation of the archaeological situation offered so far, outlines a range of purificatory rituals, such as blood sacrifice and libations of liquids into the ground (pit) to the “polluted *Tritopatores* as to the heroes” followed by regular *thysia*-like actions to the pure ancestral spirits “as to the gods”. A clue to understanding the meaning of this ritual is provided by the passage in Porphyry. (*de ant. Nymph. 31*), quoting Pherecydes of Syros, who mentions recesses, and dens (pits), caves, gates, and ports<sup>1</sup>, meaning in a riddling manner the passage of the souls to and from earthly existence (see the comments in Scaford 1986, p. 13; last in Φολ Β. 2000, p. 20-21; Φολ V. 2003, p. 239-250). According to Scaford this idea could be considered as deriving from ritual, probably similar to that of several Greek mysteries, which may well have involved the caves, ditches and gates listed by Pherekydes (Scaford 1986, p. 13-14). As it was demonstrated, the eventually ritual origin of this concept could give some clue to the interpretation of the pit structures attested in Thracian context being an essential instrument associated with the transformation and contact between this and the Underworld.

At this point the idea coheres in generally the Hittite practices, which, even representing spatially and chronologically distant cases provide striking analogies with our recent subject. Several texts discussed recently by Collins describe a number of ritual actions addressed to the Dark Earth Goddess and the *Anunnaki* – the Primordial Underworld deities (see Collins 1995, p. 224-238). Usually they were performed out of doors and communication achieved by means of pits dig into the ground in response to a specific problem. The most prominent reference to the significance of this ritual element is given by the inclusion of the Pit (*Api*) among the gods of the Underworld, which is not so much a testimony of its divine status as it is a recognition of its extra-human power to connect the realm of the gods with that of the man (Collins 1995, p. 225). The pit has been considered to serve a number of functions in Hittite ritual: as a channel for the chthonic deities and as a door through which they receive offerings; as a way of insuring fertility of the earth and humans; as a means of disposing of impurities by consigning them to the earth as an offering or finally to attract the deity to her new home (Collins 1995, p. 226). Concerning the animal sacrifice in which the blood has played significant role, the most common victims were lambs, sheep and piglets – the latter giving the main reason for drawing “tantalizing” parallels with some of the practices attested within the Greek *Thesmophoria* and the Eleusinian mysteries (see Collins 1995, p. 237-238).

To go further on, it seems also acceptable to extend the diapason of Collins' arguments and to point at certain similarities with the above described practices in the Thracian pit complexes, which may have an origin in the common set of ideas developed in a process of the well attested Thracian – Anatolian interrelations since the earliest periods in their history.

In the light of the analogies given so far, several conclusions are possible. The rituals attested in the Thracian pits are most probably related and addressed to chthonic deities, but they also have to do somehow with the notion of the primordial ancestors – *anthropodaimones* and

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<sup>1</sup> τοῦ Συρίου Φερεκύδου μυχοῦς  
καὶ βόθρους καὶ ἄντρα καὶ θύρας καὶ πύλας λέγοντος καὶ διὰ  
τούτων αἰνιττομένους τὰς τῶν ψυχῶν γενέσεις καὶ ἀπογενέσεις ...

Lords of the inhabited lands. The latter could be considered to be reminiscent of the concept of the heroes created and ideologically elaborated in the course of the Greek polis development. There are several additional facts that speak in support of this.

The first one is implicit in the possibilities to establish a territorial relationship between pit sanctuaries, settlements and necropolises existed on one and the same place. In some of the cases there are very important observations made by the excavators. Several examples as those in Troyanovo, Debel, Drama, Staliyska mahala etc. point at the consecutive existence of earlier settlements and later pit sanctuaries or at a co-existence of pits and necropolises as well (Бонев 1996; Лихардус et al. 2001, p. 181, fig. 60; Господинов, Костова 2005, p. 54-55; Божкова, Ников 2005, p. 74; Нехризов, Валентинова 2006, p. 144 – 145; Тонкова, Миков 2006, p. 166 – 167).

Accordingly one may suppose, that the rituals attested in the pit sanctuaries were probably intended to purify and to sanctify certain territory, which was believed as belonging to the ancestral spirits. Therefore they need to be propitiated by libations, animal and blood sacrifices as “to the heroes” in order to realize their transformation and regeneration – an idea which is comparable with the notion given by Pherekydes. After that the new-born pure spirits shall be worshiped “as gods” according to terminology of the Selinous sacred law. The second motive could be searched in the need of self-definition of the community, which confirmed ritually its autochthony by means of the described rites. The most substantial proofs in support are some particular finds, which are common to the inventory of the pits. Those are the clay remains originating from every part of the house, wall-plaster, fragments of portable hearths etc. (summarized in Георгиева et al. 1999, p. 171; for the last attested examples of similar practices see in Нехризов, Валентинова 2006, p. 144; Тонкова, Георгиева 2006, p. 164-165; Тонкова, Миков 2006, p. 166-167). To this category belong probably some special vessel’s fragments with stamps or inscriptions referring to the eventual names of settlements as this from Debel (Балабанов 1999, p.74, fig. 16) (Fig. 6).

Following this trend of interpretation, the cases in which only parts of human skeletons or single skulls have been attested (Балабанов 1999, p. 69) could be considered as a symbolic act of lying to rest the ancestral relics. This suggestion does not contradict the statement that they may represent a type of precautionary measure against a harmful dead, who lies unburied (Георгиева 1999, p. 227; Georgieva 2003, p. 318-319). There is although worth to note, that the *anthropodaimones* – the lords of the land are also able to get the community in trouble if they were not appeased by sacrifice.

The next group of finds, which according to some opinions represent typical “objects of the cult”, such as the roughly shaped clay figurines, dices etc. allows to be interpreted in the same context. Their rare occurrence, as pointed out by some scholars, is not as surprising as it was considered to be (Балабанов 2002, p. 542). This type of objects evoked special interest among many Bulgarian scholars from the 50<sup>th</sup> years of the last century onwards (Миков В. 1958, p. 657 – 671; Тачева – Хитова М. 1971; Теодосиев 1990; Фол 1991, p. 83-95; 114-120; Теодосиев 1992).

In the course of my recent study on the problem it seems that the most plausible clue to their interpretation is not simply in their shape (as in Теодосиев 1990, 1992), but in the act of their modeling and depositing in a particular context (Коннова 2004; Коннова 2005). Working down figurines of clay (mud, soil) is significant of the ritual purification by itself, as referred also by the Hittite texts (Collins 1995, p. 227-228). The act of lying them into the pit could be compared – although with certain reservations, with the whole set of actions, described in the orphic narrative about the Argonauts as well (for interpretation see in Фол 2002, p. 120-122).

The text gives an account of the rituals performed by Orpheus – not the singer, but the magician, intended to appease the mighty chthonic Artemis – the guardian of the gate, behind which the Golden Fleece has been kept, by digging up a tree-foot *bothros*, by throwing grains and/or roughly molded figurines (?) (Кочова 2005, p. 153).

It is however a matter of fact that exploiting the similarities between the literary tradition and the archaeologically attested traces of rituals is more or less speculative matter. Thus the more sophisticated approach rely undoubtedly upon the comprehensive analysis of the whole set of finds in the context of the rituals in each particular complex. From this standpoint the definition of the roughly modeled figurines and of other finds as “typical cultic objects” sounds less convincing, since the rest of the finds situated in pits can change their utilitarian meaning and function on a ritual level (see in Osborn 2004, 1-10). Therefore the appearance of “cultic figurines” in single complexes could be considered as a manifestation of the singularity of the magical act of modeling, i.e. discerning and denoting of the creative divine nature, responsible for the organization and renewal of the Cosmos. On the other hand the act in itself must have represented an equivalent of the ritual purification by means of the divine unity with the ancestors.

Further on considering the coincidence of the initial period of existence of the pit-sanctuary by Debelt with the establishment of the colony Apollonia Pontica and the finds of imported ware, one of the plausible views is that the complex represents one of the “meeting points” between the new settlers and the natives, where the former continue to adopt rituals which are very close to the ancestral cults in Hellas itself and on the other hand - to the polis concept of the heroes taking shape exactly at this time. The ritual actions, which have been performed by them, were intended not only to appease the ancestral spirits – the lords of the land, but also to provide a kind of sacral sanction of their autochthony in the newly settled territories by “performing the rituals according to the ancestral custom” and thereby creating a new “past” for themselves as well as a new social and religious reality, after the words of C. Antonaccio (Antonaccio 1999, p. 121).

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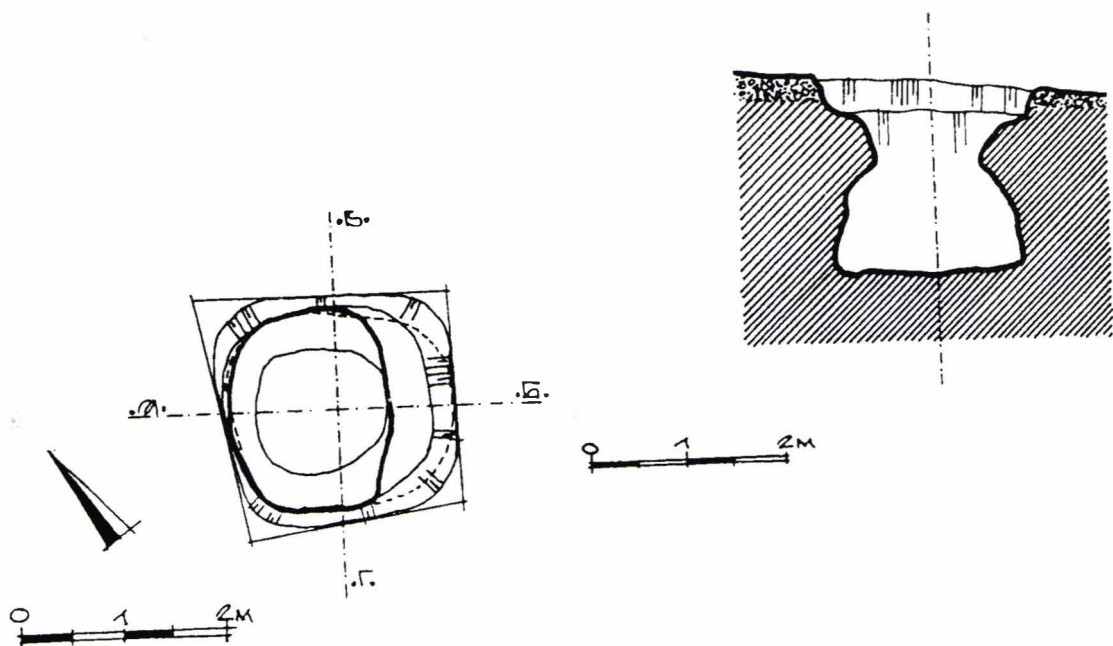


Fig. 1. Map of the pit-sanctuaries in Bulgaria.

Fig. 2. Plan and cross-section of the ritual pits from Debelt (after Balabanov 1999, fig.9).

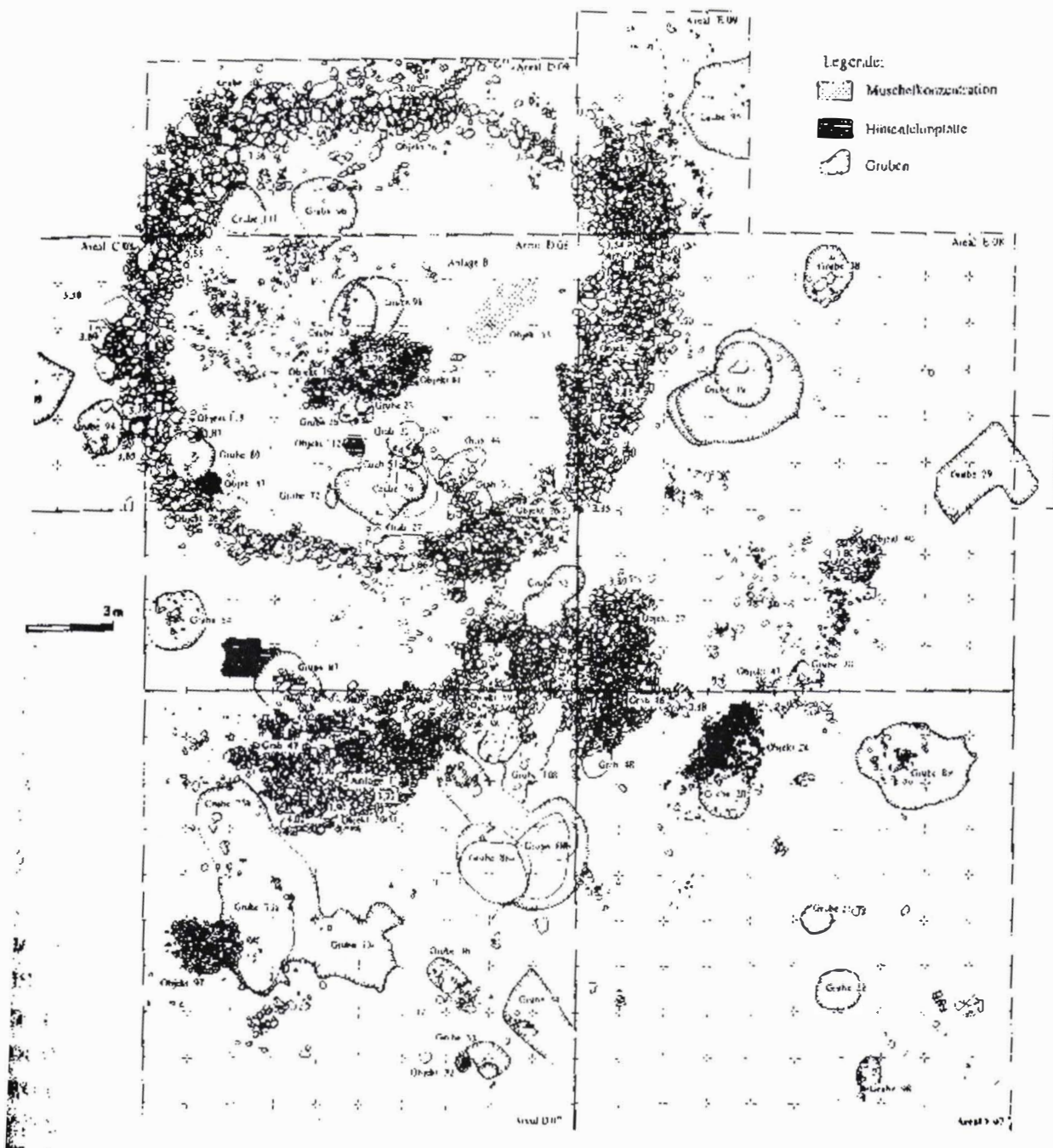


Fig. 3. Plan of the structure B in the place Drama-Kairyaka (after Lichardus and al. 2001, p. 137, fig. 47).

**One of the round structures with ritual pits  
on the Acropolis of Monte Polizzo (after Morris et al. 2002)**

**Structure A1**

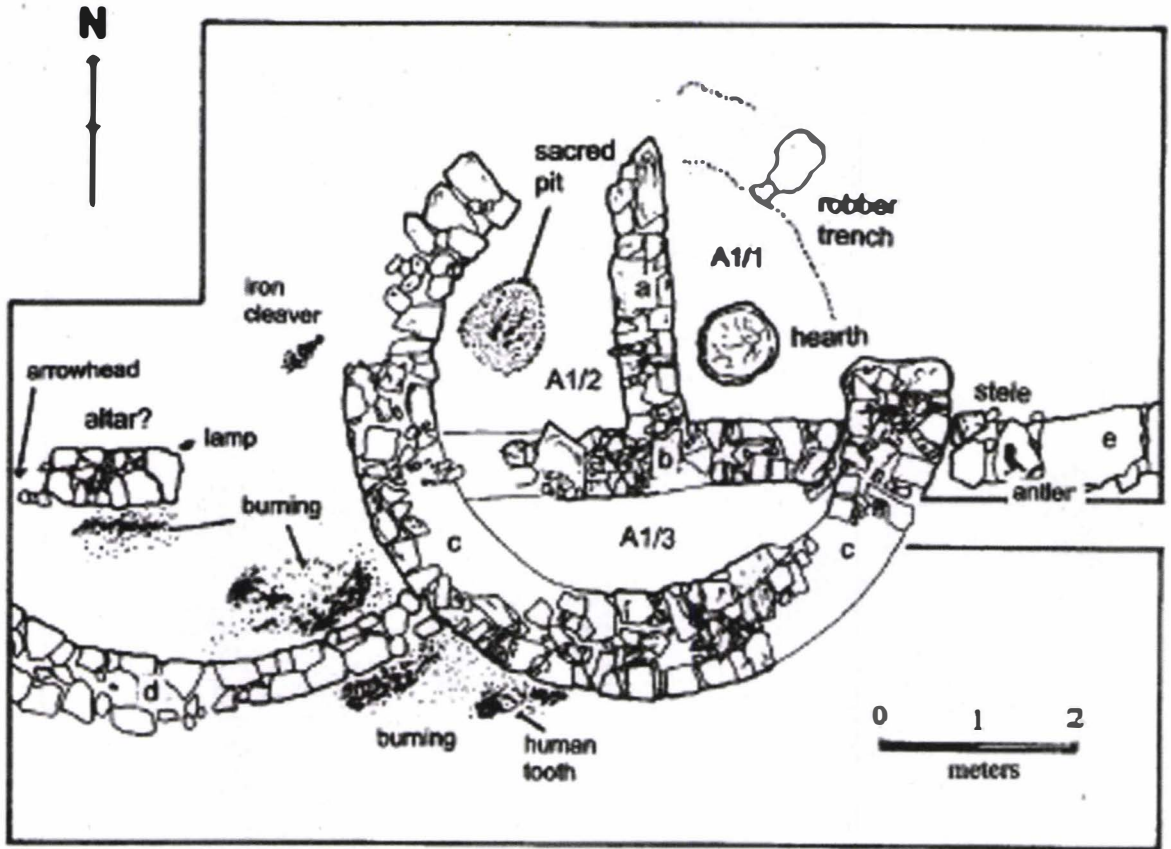
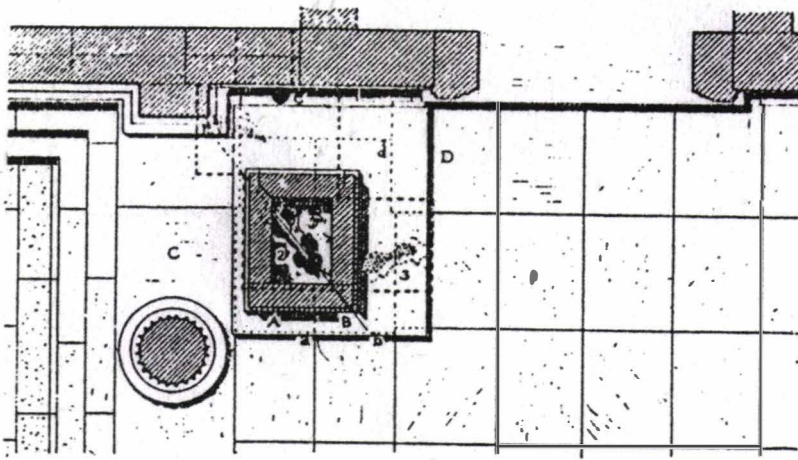
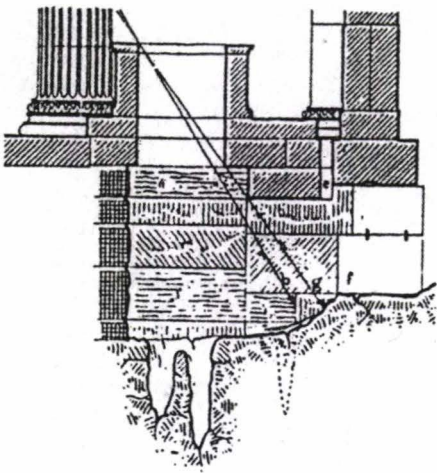
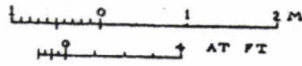


Fig. 4. The round structure A with the ritual pits in the Acropolis of Monte Polizzo (after Morris et al. 2002).

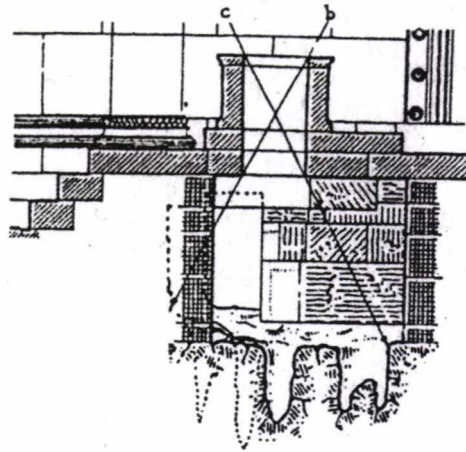
Hollow altar for libations and ritual pit in the Athenian Erechtheion  
 (After Ekroth 2000, 275, fig.1)



A



B



c

5



6

Fig. 5. Hollow altar for libations and ritual pit in the Athenian Erechtheion (after Ekroth 2000, 275, fig. 1).

Fig. 6. Graffito inscription with the name of the settlement near Debel (after Balabanov 1999, 74, fig. 16).