Inventory of the Animal Bones from an Early Iron Age Grave

ALEXANDRA BOLOMEY

Bucarest

The discovery and excavation by E. Moscalu of the grave at Meri [1] (commune of Vedea, Teleorman district) have given the first glimpse of animal offerings in the Romanian Plain in the early Hallstatt period (Hallstatt A).

The almost complete skeleton of a *roe-deer* was found. The few small bones which are missing (mostly carpal and tarsal bones and phalanges) have certainly not been recovered. All the bones have a dark yellow-brownish colour. The better preserved right mandible contains decidual teeth plus M_1 just erupting, indicating that the animal was killed at the age of about 5 months. The distal epiphyses of the radius and of the metapodials are unfused.

Since young roe-deer are born in May, the time of killing would be late autumn (October).

Ovicaprids are represented by three specimens: a fragment of right maxillary with D^4-M^1, an isolated left D^4 and an isolated left M^3. The first two specimens probably belonged to the same skull. The animal was sacrificed when it was about 6 months old. On the other hand, M^3 displays advanced wear, thus proving the presence of an adult individual as well.

Three *cattle* bones have also been recovered: a maxillary fragment with M^1 and erupting M^2, indicative of a 16—17 month-old animal; a right and a left scapula. The measurements of the two shoulder-blades are slightly different demonstrating that they come from two animals; the smaller one may have belonged to the same animal as the teeth.

There is a single *horse* fragment (proximal right femur). The break is fresh, which leaves a question mark regarding the extent of the missing part.

Both cattle and horse bones are light yellow, almost white, as if they were much fresher than the roe-deer's. Since it is obvious that the roe-deer's body was deposited in the grave as such, and that the soft parts rotted there, the lighter colour of the cattle and horse bones must be attributed to the fact that they are leavings of the funeral meal, i.e. cooked before being buried.

For later periods there is evidence of the selection of one animal species to be buried with the human corpse or with its calcinated remains. It was the horse with the Scythians, Thracians and other populations. One (Peretu, Zimnicea[2]) or more horses (tumuli XX, XVII, XIX and XII at Histria[3], Agighiol[4]) were placed in the grave either intact (Agighiol, Zimnicea) or represented only by the skull and extremities of the legs (Peretu, Zimnicea). Thus the ritual became more strictly selective as regards both the species and the parts of the body.

Analyses of animal bones from 4th century A. D. cemeteries have suggested the hypothesis that the sacrificed animals, which formed the main burial offerings, were precisely those which had played the most important role in the economy of the human community involved.[5]

It seems that during the early Iron Age animal offerings were still made at random.

[1] See E. Moscalu in the same volume.

[2] S. Haimovici, AŞUIaşi, 17, 1971, p. 169—185.

[3] *Histria* II, Bucureşti, 1966, p. 145 — 159 and 385—396.

[4] Al. Bolomey, SCA, 5, 1968, 1, p. 27—31.

[5] Al. Bolomey, SCA, 4, 1967, 1, p. 25—35.