

THE FUNERARY PRACTICES FROM THE END OF THE BRONZE AGE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE IRON AGE IN THE SOUTH-WEST OF ROMANIA AND THE RELATIONS WITH THE SOUTH OF DANUBE

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Abstract: *The socio-anthropological approach to the funerary practices proves a tight connection between the religious beliefs and the funerary practices. However, it is hard to be evidenced only through the funerary discoveries most of the time. The study of the funerary space structure reveals several possibilities for interpretation, provided the necropolises are researched thoroughly. In the analysis made on the funerary practices, there are often used notions, such as that of a social person, understood as a variety of situations (age, social rank, gender etc.), or social energy consumed during the development of a funerary practice. In this manner only, hypotheses can be issued regarding the social structure if it considers that the funerary space can also be seen as a confirmation of the social identity. The funerary practices can “codify” information related both to the social structure and ideology, thus to the collective mentality of those communities. Different attempts have been made to sketch the religion of the prehistoric communities, using the funerary discoveries for this purpose. To the north of the Danube, in the south-western side of Romania, the funerary practices used to be characteristic for the end of the Bronze Age, which implied the cremation of the dead and the depositing of the remains into a pottery vessel that played the role of an urn. This was buried along with one or more adjacent vessels and sometimes clay statuettes. Among the archaeological discoveries available in the actual stage of the researches, the Gârla Mare type is evidenced, which belongs to the wider area of the incrustated ceramics groups situated on one side and another on the middle inferior course of the Danube. Most of them come from the necropolises of cremation in an urn, being known only a few discoveries of settlements. At the beginning of the Iron Age, a different funerary practice can be noticed, i.e., the building of tumuli and the depositing of the offerings in vessels, on the bottom of them. The disappearance of the plane necropolises, starting with the 12th century BCE and the appearance, in the same period, of the tumular constructions because of the richness or the quantity of the social energy invested in them suggest the appearance of new forms of collective representation, a change in the collective mentality. Furthermore, as a tendency to affirm the social identity, the funerary tumulus can be pointed out.*

Keywords: funerary practices; the anthropological research; south-western of Romania; late Bronze Age; the beginning of the Iron Age.

The socio-anthropological approach of the funerary practices, starting with the 20th century, allowed the understanding of the funerary behaviour diversity to be followed by the more nuanced knowledge of this type of archaeological discoveries. The funerary ceremony takes place on several stages that are indissolubly related to each other, stages that, in their turn, are related to the rites during which the communities observe certain rules strictly (Gennep, 2001: 32-47). A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, analysing the primitive societies, asserted that “the religion was an essential part in the establishment of a society. The forms of the religion and of the social structure correspond to one another” (Radcliffe-Brown, 2001: 152). This opinion is relatively close to the conception that G. Dumézil developed. Analysing the mythology that he considered specific for the population that belongs to the Indo-European linguistic family, he tried to demonstrate that “the ideology” of a society reflects the structure of its social organization, meaning that the mythical figures from the Indian, Iranian, or Roman pantheon reproduce the tripartite system that we find in the social organization represented by the religious, warrior and economic functions (Dumézil, 1995).

There is a tight connection between the religious beliefs and the funerary practices but, most of the times, this is hard to be evidenced only through the funerary discoveries. There have been made different attempts to sketch the religion of the prehistoric communities, using the funerary discoveries for this purpose. Taking into consideration the complexity of the phenomenon, the reserves regarding the veracity when thinking of such hypotheses, we are entitled to assert that the information on the religious beliefs of the period that is analysed here reveals only the external forms of the spiritual manifestation. Starting with the First Iron Age, the Carpathian and Danube space is characterised by few of the funerary discoveries. Other types of funerary practices could be assumed that do not allow the preservation in time of the traces, such are the dispersing of the cremated remains, or the exposure of the dead bodies (Vulpe, 2008: 287-272).

The archaeological, anthropological, and ethnographic research showed a great variety of death related rites. We can exemplify, presenting the description of a funerary ceremony at the Bororo tribe, reproduced C. Lévi-Strauss, in *Tropice triste/ Sad Tropics*, where there can be noticed both the novelty of the ceremony and the fact that the deceased had another type of ritual because he did not belong to that community.

”When I arrived at Keyara, somebody had just died; unfortunately, the indigenous was from another village. Thus, I could not enjoy the privilege of assisting to the double burial that consists of firstly

depositing the body in the middle of the village, in a pit covered with branches, in which it is kept until it rots for then to take the bones and wash them in the river and paint and embellish them with feathers before they are submerged, in a basket, onto the bottom of a lake or a running water” (Lévi-Strauss, 1968: 242).

It was this change of ontological status that the death involves, through association with the death and the resurrection of nature, that made possible the use, in certain passing rites, of the ritual death symbolism. The rites are more complex as it is not just about a natural phenomenon, but about a change of ontological and social regime. Ritual practices provided by this event are meant to lighten the parting for the deceased safely from this world to guide him to the World beyond, and to protect him of the evil spirits and furthermore to ensure him the inclusion on the other land. At the same time, rites are being carried out to restore the moral and social balance of the family and the wider community (Ceașescu, 2019: 15-22).

To some people, only the ritual burial confirms the death, the person not buried according to the custom is not thought to be dead. To others, somebody’s death is acknowledged only after fulfilling the funerary ceremonies and, if the deceased’s soul was accompanied by rituals to their new house, into the dead realm, they would be welcomed by the dead people community (Eliade, 2000: 139).

An important aspect in the primitive community religion is the cult for the ancestors. As referring to it, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown showed that: “The rites which the members of the group attend are connected to their own ancestors, including the offerings and the sacrifices as well... The social function of the rites is obvious: receiving a solemn and collective expression, the rites reaffirm, renew, and rebuild the feelings which the social solidarity depends on” (Radcliffe-Brown, 2001: 152-153). It was considered, even by some socio-anthropologists such as H. Spencer or J. Frazer, that the fear of death would have generated the primitive religion. Even if such ideas cannot be totally supported, the French anthropologist C. Rivière was certainly right on addressing the importance held by the cult of the ancestors.

The ancestors “even worshiped or often promoted to the rank of privileged intermediaries between man and divinity, appeared, among other things, in the death and funerary rites and were manifesting through invocations...through offerings, individual or familial, through libations and sacrifices made in previously determined places, all having the purpose to gain the benevolence from the other world. This cult belongs to a conception that implies the idea of a social arrangement continuity and a cyclic renewing of life” (Rivière, 2000: 32).

The archaeological research from the last decades has shown and theorised the fact that the funerary deposits can “codify” information related both to the social structure and to the ideology, thus to the collective mentality of those communities. To this regard, in the analysis made on the funerary practices, there are often used notions, such as that of *social person*, understood as a variety of situations (age, social rank, gender etc.) that define the identity of a community which the individual belongs to, or *social energy* consumed during the developing of a funerary practice (Bailey, 2002: 23-27; Tainter, 1978: 105-141). Discussing the problems related to the social status representation in the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age, shows that the main source of information is the study of the necropolises. “With their help, we are able to have an appropriate image on the social statute of the buried people and, implicitly, to try to reconstruct the organization system for the society which the individuals come from. To this category of information, there are added other pieces regarding the beliefs of the studied social groups, reflected in their funerary customs” (Vulpe, 2010: 366).

The study of the funerary space structure reveals several possibilities for interpretation, provided the necropolises are researched completely (seldom done objectively). In this manner only, hypotheses can be issued regarding the social structure, if it is to consider the fact that the funerary space can be also seen as a confirmation of the social identity.

Among the archaeological discoveries that are available in the actual stage of the researches, the *Gârla Mare* archaeological culture (the Middle and Late Bronze) is evidenced, which belongs to the wider area of the incrustrated pottery groups situated on one side and another, on the middle and inferior course of the Danube (Lazăr, 2017: 7-15). The presence of this type on the actual territory of several river-side states, determined the archaeologist from those countries to present, under different names, the same archaeological phenomenon, namely the Romanians called it *Gârla Mare*, the Serbians *Dubovac-Žuto Brdo* and the Bulgarian *Novo Selo* or *Balej-Orsoja*. It is obvious that *Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare* types are concentrated along the two Danube banks, in a geographical area delimited approximately on the west by the Belgrade area, and on the east, by the river-mouth of the Olt meeting the Danube.

This archaeological culture was defined and studied especially on the basis of the necropolises, the settlements being less researched, fact that did not allow the elaboration of a clear stratigraphic succession that would allow a division on three phases. The evolution phases are, in most of the cases, delimited especially on typological criteria. Through the rich and varied ornaments, associated with certain types of vessels, the *Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare* type pottery gains a distinct individuality. From the richness of forms,

we mention the amphorae (actually some large vessels) with a long and trapezium-shaped neck, moulded in one, two or three levels, cups with one or two lugs, porringers with the mouth shaped in three or four corners or with pedestalled, double or aviform vessels. Between the river-mouth of Morava and Moldova Veche, a regional aspect was found, which was named Dubovac-Žuto Brdo by the Serbian archaeologists (Tasić, 1974: 464-465).

An important presence on the entire areal are the anthropomorphic statuettes that can have a rich ornament but can also be undecorated. Such special items were found in tombs of cremation in urn at Balta Verde (Berciu, Comşa, 1956: 255-489), Cârna (Dumitrescu, 1961), Vajuga-Pesak, Orsoja (Dzhanfezova, 2010: 9-15) - the southern Danube etc. Both on the pottery and on the statuettes, there can be noticed decorative motifs realised through incision and stamping that were afterwards incrustated with white paste. The most frequent motifs are the spirals, the zigzag lines, the garlands, the meanders, the triangles, and the rhombuses, but also the simple or concentric circles. The bronze objects discovered in this area are quite few, except for a small number of adornment items deposited into the tombs, most of them could not be certainly attributed.

In Romania, the most important discoveries were made in the areas of Ostrovu Corbului (Hänsel, Roman, 1984: 188-229), Balta Verde, Mehedinţi County and in the south of Dolj County, around the moors of Ghidici (Nica 1995: 236; Lazăr 1999: 19-37), Cârna (Dumitrescu, 1961) and Bistreţ (Chicideanu, 1986: 7-47). The most well-known sites from Bulgaria are at Balej (Georgiev, 1982: 194-196; Shalganova, 1995: 291-308), where there was dug a settlement with four levels of dwelling and the necropolis with over 300 tombs of cremation in urn from Orsoja (Dzhanfezova, 2010: 9-15) or the older and newer discoveries around Novo Selo (7).

The Gârla Mare type discoveries, the cremation necropolises from the south Danube were reconsidered by Tatiana Shalganova (Shalganova, 1994: 185-195; 1995: 291-308) who believed that, in Bulgaria existed two chronological horizons, the first represented by the classical phase of the cultures with incrustated pottery, and the second by the grooved pottery, specific for the Early Hallstatt. Using the stratigraphic data that had been obtained in the settlements from Balej and from Vidin - "Peştera Magura", but also the analogies with the similar discoveries from Serbia and Romania, the author tried to capture the interval from the incrustated pottery of the Bronze Age to the one from the First Iron Age, characterised by the presence of the grooved decoration.

The cremation in the urn necropolis from Cârna, Dolj County, dug in the half of the last century by Vladimir Dumitrescu, exemplary published in 1961, has until recently been the only archaeological station from this cultural group that was researched and published integrally, from the entire

region (Dumitrescu, 1961). The material of this monograph constituted the base of the latter efforts of internal periodisation for the Gârla Mare culture, facilitating the chronological parallelisms with the archaeological zones and cultures from the immediate neighbourhood.

Bernard Hänsel, using different criteria, proposed a new periodisation for the Cârna necropolis (Hänsel, 1968: 235, 239-142), when discussing the chronology of the Vatina and Dubovac groups. The author established five pottery forms that he considered he would be able to date certainly, with the help of some bronze items from other tombs that contained the same type of vessel. Through the statistic method that he used, the author considered the situations when certain types of vessels appear in small numbers irrelevant (the double or aviform vessels) and also the double or triple tombs. Although he observed that the dividing in three phases of the cemetery from Cârna is not confirmed by the planimetric study, Hänsel thought that there could not be made references to an ordinate disposal of the tombs.

In his work from 1976, Hänsel takes the debating regarding the chronology and the periodisation of the Gârla Mare culture again, thinking that his affirmations from 1968 could be also confirmed by the discoveries from Balej (Bulgaria). The end of the Gârla Mare culture was considered synchronous with the end of what he called the second horizon of the bronze hoards, being situated around 1100 B.C. (Hänsel, 1976: 62).

The discussions about the necropolis from Cârna were again considered by Ion Chicideanu (Chicideanu, 1986: 7-47) who had objections regarding Hänsel's periodisation. Using the statistical-combinatory analysis, he came to the conclusion that the necropolis was unitary chronological, but divided into two areas, the eastern one (36 tombs mostly with meander decorated pottery) and the western one (with 80 tombs and preponderantly grooved materials). Therefore, the necropolis would be unitary from the chronological point of view, constituting "a phase – the Cârna phase – of the Gârla Mare culture", the two areas, divided in two parts, would reflect the organisation of that community as being one made of four kindreds, according to an exogamic dualist system. Using this opportunity, the author also showed that in the north Danube area, the Gârla Mare culture was followed by the Bistreţ-Işalniţa group that makes the transition towards the Iron Age. It should be pointed out that this kind of approach regarding the structure of the necropolis from Cârna might favour the reconsideration on the duration of this site, with implications on the effective time length of the entire group of necropolises to which, because of the great number of discovered tombs, it is attributed a chronological interval of few centuries (see below), without being necessary.

During the last years, Christine Reich has had a new attempt of periodisation for the Cârna cemetery, starting from a proper typology, based

on the combinatory analysis of the decorative forms and motifs, realized by ordering the ceramic inventory from 49 tombs. She considered that the cemetery had developed on three funerary parcels, belonging to three numerous families, for each part corresponding tombs from the four chronological stages, the older tombs being situated in the middle of each area. The author emphasized that it cannot yet be mentioned a decoration specific for each family or groups of tombs (Reich, 2002: 159-179)

A major contribution, realised through the critical analysis made to the older and newer discoveries of the Gârla Mare type, but also to the definition of the cultural and chronological placing of those sites, is the work recently published by Monica Șandor-Chicideanu from the middle and inferior Danube area unitary, from both banks of the river Danube. The author placed the culture Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare in the interval situated between approximately 1650-1250/1200 BCE, followed by the Bistreț-Ișalnița group that is considered the one that ended its existence around 1100 BCE (Șandor, Chicideanu, 1986: 209-213).

The above discussed that the incrustrated pottery might represent one of the most rich-ornamented pottery of the Middle and Late Bronze from Europe, due to the decoration technique (incision and incrusting with white paste) that allowed the creation of various motifs. The observation made by Vi. Dumitrescu is worth mentioned, being contained in the published the report on the chemical analysis regarding the white paste used for incrusting from the decor of the Cârna - "Balta Nasta" vessels (Dumitrescu, 1961: 160). Unfortunately, less exploited in the studies dedicated to this group of necropolises, is the discovery according to which the white substance used for filling the incrusting decor was made of a paste that contained cremated "bones dust", assumingly human. The importance of this information, regarded from an anthropological perspective, for the interpretation of the funerary cult ideology is certainly worth considering. To evidence the importance of such analyses that will support the archaeological research, there must be mentioned the recent results obtained after the analysis of the "so-called ashy content" from the ash-places of Noua type, when there can be cited the sedimentological studies, recently made in such "ash-places" from Basarabia that proved to be rich in calcium carbonate and phosphates, but not in ash resulted after wood combustion (Kaiser, Sava, 2006: 137-172).

It appears that a unity of forms and decorations can be identified, preserved for a specific reason by the communities that lived both on the right and the left bank of the Danube. Analysing the ornamental motifs, the way in which they are associated on the vessel, but also their frequency, one can notice differences amongst the several groups of discoveries. Understood in this manner, the variations may reflect the group identity of these communities. Using this procedure, there might be eventually noticed the

grouping of the different zonal communities which this big “family” of the incrustrated pottery is made of. This theme could be enlarged but it might divert us from the objective of the present work.

In the 1980s, on the occasion of the digs made in the area Bistreț – Cârna, Ion Chicideanu identified a cultural group that the author chronologically placed during the interval of the 13th-12th centuries BCE and that he called Bistreț – Ișalnița (Chicideanu, 1986: 7-47). That group was thought to occupy the Danube meadow, from the Gorge to the mouth of Olt River and would represent the last manifestation of the Bronze Age in that area, being contemporary, in Banat, to the second phase of the cultural group Cruceni-Belegiș and preceding the appearance of the Vârtoș type grooved pottery. The mentioned author considered that this pottery group appeared after taking some western influences of Cruceni-Belegiș type on the Gârla Mare local cultural fund. Ion Chicideanu reunited a series of discoveries of pottery items in the Bistreț-Ișalnița group, similar to those from the eponymous stations.

Later, Monica Șandor-Chicideanu added other discoveries to the list from 1986, previously considered to belong to this cultural group (Șandor-Chicideanu, 2003: 30). Thus, in Bulgaria, the most famous discoveries added to this type are the three cremation tombs from Makreš Grobišćeto (Dzhanfezova, 2010: 17-18) and the site from Gradešnica (Georgiev 1982: 187-202), and, in Serbia, the tombs from Vajuga (Korbovo-Pesak) and Usije-“Grad” (Șandor-Chicideanu, 2003: 256). It is noticeable that, most of the times, the funerary discoveries of Bistreț-Ișalnița type are situated in the same places where there were before the Gârla Mare type necropolises.

During the entire period of the middle Bronze, and especially in that of the Late Bronze, there can be seen an intensification regarding the presence of the southern influences, either from the Mycenaean world, or, in a wider aspect, from the Aegean-Anatolian area, which are noticed in the cultural manifestations from the Carpathian and Danube space. There ought to be mentioned the decoration from the pottery of several cultural aspects, but there should as well be evoked the ornaments from different metal or bone items etc. Starting with the end of the Bronze Age, the spreading of some decorative forms and motifs from the areas of the Tei and Zimnicea-Plovdiv cultures can be seen in the south, situation observed better at Kastanas, on the valley of the river Axios and at Assiros (Hochstetter, 1982: 99-118). The Gârla Mare elements (assumed to be from the late phase) and Babadag I were also attested in the level VII B 2 from Troy, their presence being sometimes interpreted as a result of some expansions, not only as cultural influences. The shifts of the populations from north to south might have occurred (an inverse direction confronted to that of the cultural influences propagated in the first half of the Bronze Age). To what extent

these discoveries reflect massive incursions or people shifting from the north-Danube spaces or whether they are just simple occurrences of some elements of material culture due to distance exchange is, for now, impossible to establish. Yet, there has to be noticed, in this context, the fact that from Kastanas to the Southern Carpathians, in a period previous to the level Troy VII B 2, a larger area had already been shaped, defined especially through the spreading of the *kantharos* type vessel, frequently met in all the cultures of the Late Bronze from this wide region (Petrescu-Dîmbovița, 2010: 281-282).

In Oltenia, the presence of such *kantharoi* is also seen in the Govora group (Verbicioara IV-Va) and rarely in the Gârla Mare area, and in Muntenia, in the late phases of the Tei culture and in the area of the Zimnicea-Plovdiv type pottery. Nonetheless, the area of that ceramic type is not extended much to the west of the river Olt, but it encompasses Muntenia especially and the south-eastern region of Romania. Once the spreading of the grooved pottery, that is dependent to a certain type of forms, goes beyond the eastern line of the Olt River, the forms characteristic for the anterior stage disappear.

To what extent the western current contributed to the genesis of this grooved pottery horizon, is still difficult to identify. Yet, the events from the entire Carpathian and Danube space do not necessarily suggest a significant migration. The local development seen in the typology of the pottery from some necropolises, as we have mentioned before on addressing the evolution of the pottery forms in the series of urn fields of Cruceni and Bobda type, does not plead for the population movement (for example the bearers of the Cruceni-Belegiš culture towards east), but it more likely reflects the adopting of the grooved decoration style, a phenomenon characteristic for a large part of Europe during this period.

At the beginning of the Iron Age, a different funerary practice can be noticed, namely the building of tumuli and the depositing of the offerings in vessels, on the bottom of them. Built with the obvious purpose of exposing the social status, both through the social energy consumed in the building of it and through the quantity and the quality of offerings, the tumular tombs are thought to have this function of representation of the social status in the literary sources as well (Vulpe, 2010: 352).

From the analysed period, in the north of the Danube, tumular constructions that incontestably contain tombs in the traditional meaning of the word have not been found. The situation from Vârtop presents similarities, but on a smaller scale, with the tumulus from Susani. The tumuli from Vârtop (Lazăr, 2011: 49) has the round or oval shape, on a beaten earth-made base had been placed the vessels, surrounded, and covered with big river stones, built up as a vault, over which the earth mound was built.

Among stones and vessels, few calcined bones have been found (which were not analysed and were lost meanwhile).

The attributing of the calcined bones, found in the Vârtoş tumulus, to a cremated human body is just hypothetical in the lack of some osteological analyses. The lack of the bones, due to the soil acidity, is possible and it was met especially in the case of the inhumation tombs. However, it is known that the burned bones have an increased resistance to the acidity of the soil, particularly if they are deposited in urn. In these conditions emerges the question if somehow those tumuli represented another type of archaeological monument, other than that called “tomb”, for their funerary function. Obviously, the total lack of the bones makes us think about the cenotaphs, but it is possible to talk about a special character deposit, with cultic role, of course.

In the tumulus from Susani, there might be a similar situation, such is the lack of a certitude regarding the human bones (there had not been found calcined bones and discovery of a skeleton in a certain area of the tumulus cannot be attributed to the Hallstattian period) (Vulpe, 1995: 81-88). There is no evidence concerning the function of the tumulus from Susani, the opinion expressed by the authors of the dig, according to which it is a funerary monument, is based only on analogies and the logic of the interpretation. Yet, it is obvious that the discovery has a cultic character (this is the first interpretation given at the UISPP Congress from Belgrade, in 1971) and it is very plausible to be related to the funerary practices, but it is not necessary to be regarded as a tomb in the proper meaning of the term that implies the deposit of the dead body.

At the same time, we notice the discoveries from Libotin, Maramureş County, where underneath the vegetal soil, in which there were found many pottery fragments, it was observed a black-grey layer, thinner to the ends and thicker in the central part where it had 0.35-0.40 m. On this base, in four places, there were agglomerations of earth mixed with coal, ash, animal calcined bones and stones (Kacsó, 1990: 79).

Different dimension tumuli were identified in “Togul Nemţilor” spot (Kacsó, 2011), at Bicaz, Maramureş County, in the region called “Țara Codrului”. The investigation, carried out in one of the tumuli, proved that they date from the same period, as those from Lăpuş, phase II. It needs to be mentioned that the discovery is near the place where two big bronze deposits were found. The discovery, made almost 50 years ago, of the tumuli from Lăpuş, Maramureş County, and the attributing of a funerary signification, that of *tombs*, and, therefore, of “necropolis”, has not been considered questionable so far.

This situation has to be explained, by analysing the necropolis from Lăpuş, since it needs to be seen how the funerary practices can undergo

changes, moving from the individual representations to collective representations. At Lăpuș, in an initial phase (Lăpuș I), there are attested cremation tombs (calcined bones) accompanied by a rich ceramic inventory and metal weapons and adornments (Kacsó, 1990: 79-98). The situation of the phase II tumuli is more complex. Besides few funerary urns, discovered isolatedly, and containing calcined *human* bones, which were secondarily positioned in the structure of the tell, in the 10th mound, in the tumuli of this category, there were found, along with the calcined bones, charcoal and ashes, a significant amount of pottery (in T 20, fragments from over 10 000 vessels were found), intact pieces of clay, partially burned rocks, few metallic items, a lot of them extremely fragmented through breaking or melting. The analysis of the calcined bones from these tumuli proved to be of animal origin. The researchers that, in the past, studied this discovery, considered that the site, judging by the form and the position of the deposit, contained the remains after a funerary ritual (Kacsó, 2011).

Biba Teržan, analysing the same necropolis (Teržan, 2005: 241-261), tried to prove that its division in several zones reflects the distribution of the tombs on sex and social statute criteria. The western group would have belonged to an elite in which, first of all, there were evidenced the warrior burials (represented especially by weapons and vessels decorated with incisions and zoomorphic busts or with prominences), but especially women (the tombs with clothes items and big grooved vessels). The southern and eastern group, having a more modest inventory and objects related to the processing of the metals (moulding valves, tools), would represent a social segment related to the metal processing profession.

Recently, with the help of the geomagnetic prospective, there have been identified, at the basis of the tumuli explored so far, wooden and clay constructions, in the shape of a basilica with the top apse oriented towards north-west, a situation met in the case of T26, explored from 2007 to present. This discovery can suggest the existence of some “mortuary houses” (of *Totenhaus* type), or sanctuaries. Furthermore, there is not necessarily a contradiction between the two aspects of the two constructions; their functionality can be merged. Geomagnetic prospection was carried out in other tumuli too, which had been unexplored, identifying similar constructions, some of them of remarkable dimensions (Kacsó, Metzner-Nebelsick, Nebelsick, 2012: 457-475).

From the same HaA period another interesting discovery appears as well at Konopište (Popović, 1998: 147-153), near Mala Vrbica (the south Danube, Serbia). Here, it was discovered an oval-shaped stone structure that had larger dimensions and density in the western side, in the eastern side displaying especially gravel. In a pit, situated in the west of that zone, there were found animal bones, a piglet skeleton, complete and fragmentary

vessels (porringers, large bitruncated vessels, with short neck and turned-up edge, a *pyraunos* type vessel, a double vessel, decorated with grooves and prominences), all of them having analogies in the Vârtop area. The cultic character of the discovery is obvious, as it is the resemblance to the situation from Vârtop, noticing at the same time the symbolic content that both discoveries bear.

Even if we go beyond the studied zone, the tumulus from Meri, Teleorman County, in Muntenia, needs to be mentioned as it presents many analogies with the discoveries from Vârtop. Here, it was researched the tumulus with the diameter of 17 x 20m, height of 1.80m and oval shape. In its centre, there had been deposited four vessels placed directly on the antic soil. At variable depths (1.80-1.50m), there had been discovered bones disposed in many groups. Near the human bones, there were placed animal bones, as well, namely deer, ox, and horse. At the basis of the mound, there had been deposited a bronze object plated with gold and an iron knife. The pottery from here resembles much to that of Vârtop. The porringer with the lip arched inwardly is decorated with four knobs and a garland ornament placed inside the vessel. We also find here other two items met at Vârtop, the double vessel and the oven vessel (Moscalu, 1976: 77-86).

On addressing the type of archaeological monuments, the tumulus from Meri resembles that from Susani. Few differences though exist, such as the smaller quantity of pottery, the missing fire purification and more reduced dimensions are. Nonetheless, the decorative motifs on the vessels (the star-shaped groove) and the square shape of the glass from Meri, reflect western influences. Emil Moscalu recognised the lack of Tei IV elements from the repertoire of pottery inventory forms in this tumulus and believed that it appeared in the later Gârla Mare fund. Altogether, he considered that the origin of the tumular monument can be connected to the situation from Transylvania or with the western regions. A great similarity is also present between the pottery from here and the Gáva type pottery, as well as the Crucești II type material. The origin of the pottery decorative style from the Meri tumulus seems to originate in the western areas.

Characteristic for the end of the Bronze Age, the incineration in plane necropolises was predominant in the studied sites. A. Vulpe considered that the reappearance of the tumulus, this time as a princely tomb at the beginning of the Iron Age, was due to some southern influences. Such funerary monuments had been mentioned in the Aegean world since early Helladic, with other examples occurring during the Mycenaean period. At the same time, the princely tombs with domes (Kuppelgräber) are in fact related to the tumular type. On the other hand, the fire purification is also known in the southern area, but only in the burial graves (Vulpe, 2010: 352).

The disappearance of the plane necropolises, starting with the 12th century BC and the appearance, in the same period, of the tumular constructions, as those from Susani, Lăpuș, Libotin or Vârtop with the richness of offerings and/or the quantity of the social energy invested in them, suggesting the appearance of new forms of collective representation, determine us to also believe that there was a change in the collective mentality. This change, in its turn, does not automatically and mandatorily reflect variations in the social structure.

The prehistoric man, as a social person, was firstly identifying himself with a certain social structure, real or imaginary, based on gender, kinship, origin relations, social or symbolic hierarchy, being the promoter of a particular type of symbolic capital (Lazăr, 2021: 126-140). We must mention that this diversity of the social statutes, activated differently during life, has led to the observation that the ethnic affiliation does not represent a major element in the archaic societies, but it is connected to ritual practices, possibly related to the cult of the dead, certainly, in a symbolic view. The funerary practices constitute themselves a symbolic expression and the tombs with a poor funerary inventory are not always the expression of an economic decline. They can sooner be the expression of a religious ideology that imposed the observing of some social rules and did not reflect the economic standard.

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