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## THE TRACIAN TUMULUS AT OPALCHENETZ – 80 YEARS LATER

(Some remarks on the question of rich female tombs in ancient Thrace)<sup>1</sup>

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In March 2007 passed the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of excavations in Thracian tumulus near the village of Opatchenetz (in the vicinity of Bulgarian town Plovdiv). However, we have still very limited information concerning this archaeological object (Дяковичъ 1930; Филов 1934, 195, 226). And so, it seems useful to look at this object from the perspective of time.

**The location and discovery.** This tumulus was situated at about 3 km East of the village and was at about 1,5-2 m high (we have no information on its diameter). Inside the tumulus was the tomb chamber made of stone. Unfortunately, we have no information concerning the construction (for instance how big it was), except the laconic information that this tomb construction was made of a simple stone and that its vault was destroyed and fallen inside. Inside the tomb were fragments of a skull and some other bones. As concerns the chronology, this object was dated on the end 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and inside the tomb was buried a woman. In conclusion, it can be said that the tumulus situated near the village of Opalchenetz contained the remains of “rich or famous” (it means the member of tribal aristocracy) Thracian women. Next, in the bibliography there was described the findings as golden pectoral, bronze jug, copper mirror and fragments of ceramics.

Nevertheless, since the publication of this object Thracology made a great progress. Many tombs and tumulus’ constructions were discovered; also some typologies were presented (Русева 2002). Especially in recent years there is a discussion in modern historiography on the character of these tomb constructions. In the one opinion, some of these constructions could fulfill the role of temples, in which later on were buried the remains of Thracians rulers or members of tribal local ar-

istocracy, which seldom became heroes after the death. On the other hand, perhaps these tombs functioned as typical sepulchral constructions, in which sometimes were made some ceremonies or cult rituals (Русева 2000; Theodossiev 2000; Димитрова 2005; Hatlas 2007). Also very important problem is the question of sex of people buried in these tumuli on the area of ancient Thrace, which are interpreted as belonging to the members of tribal aristocracy – thanks to the rich things put inside or thanks the tomb construction under the tumulus. And so, nothing strange that the modern science quite often try to return to these first (pioneer) discoveries and try to make the reinterpretation of some already known objects – from the perspective of a new knowledge. For instance, the Bulgarian archaeologist Nikola Theodossiev throw recently the new light on the tumulus from Rozovetz in the modern Bulgaria (Theodossiev 2005).

The tumulus. In the case of tumulus from the vicinity of the village Opatchenetz we can say that it was not big. Thanks to the typology made by Georgi Kitov, this tumulus can be situated between the category of “very small tumulus” and “small tumulus” (Китов 1993, 50). This last category presents the greatest amount of Thracian tumuli, discovered both by archaeologists and by tombs’ robbers (named by Bulgarians as „imaniari” – or “treasure hunters”). On the base of information presented by B. Diakovich it is difficult to say whether there were other similar objects near analyzed tumulus. We have no information or traces of religious ceremonies conducted on/inside the tumulus. However, the small size of this tumulus and its location inside the field enable us to make the hypothesis that traces of eventual religious ceremonies could be destroyed during the agricultural activities long before the excavation of this tumulus.

The tomb construction. Unfortunately, we have no other descriptions or information on size of

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the tomb construction. And so, it is impossible to make any classification. We even do not know what shape had the tomb chamber – was it round or rectangular. If it was round, perhaps it was the cupola tomb; already over 30 cupola tombs were discovered on the area of ancient Thracia (HAtlas 2005). Perhaps it was rather primitive construction and it would be impossible to classify it as the cupola tomb – the most developed type of Thracian tombs. On the other hand, the tomb chamber perhaps was rectangular in shape. We have no information on eventual other rooms inside the tumulus. We know only the location of tomb construction – in the South West part of the tumulus. The laconic information on the simple stones used for the construction suggests that perhaps it was so-called “pseudo tomb” or “primitive tomb”. We have no information on the scale of destroying the tumulus. If the process of destruction was not great, the size presented by B. Diakovich suggests that perhaps under the tumulus was not tomb but simple the grave, in which were some rich objects – and so it was kind of the so-called “princely tomb” in archaeological terminology. The use by Bulgarian scholar word of “tomb” and not “grave” is not important in this case because in the Thracian archaeology both these terms were used (both in past and in modern times) as the synonyms.

*The burial.* Perhaps the greatest possibility of speculation and misinterpretation form the man’s remnants discovered inside the tumulus. Firstly, there were discovered only in part; and secondly, the author of this article does not know anything on the possible anthropological investigation of these remnants. The sex of the buried person was established only on base of archaeological information (i.e. objects found inside) and presented as kind of the final conclusion. Nevertheless, during the 80 years which passed after the discovering of the tumulus of Opalchenetz the question of rich female burials amongs Thracians was analyzed several times. Firstly, the singular discoveries were interpreted (such as in this case), only on base of some objects found inside. In this opinion, some luxury goods such as golden or silver earrings or some objects connected with hygienic or cosmetics testify the female burial. And such the objects were (almost automatically) described as female burials. The beginning of discussion on the above-mentioned problem was already in the 1920s and was connected with the archaeological

excavations in Duvanli – at about 25 km North of the town of Plovdiv (HAtlas 2004). There were discovered some tumuli, amongst them the most important were such objects as: Kukuva Mogila (Дяковичъ 1925; Филов 1927; Филов 1933, 273; Филов 1934, 6-58; Venedikov, Gerasimov 1978, 31; Тонкова 2002, 496), Goljamata Mogila (Филов 1933, s. 218-247; Филов 1934, 98-126; Venedikov, Gerasimov 1978, 31), Bashova Mogila (Велков 1931, 1-25; Филов 1933, 274; Филов 1934, 59-79; Русева 2002, 90, nr 5), Lozarskata Mogila (Филов 1933, 248-252.), Arabadžijskata Mogila (Филов 1933, 253-272; Филов 1934, 127-142; Русева 2002, 88, nr 3) and Mushovitza Mogila (Велков 1931, 25-42; Филов 1933, 273; Филов 1934, 82-97). Inside the tumuli in Duvanli were burials together with rich objects. As the decisively female burial was interpreted the tumulus of Arabadžijskata Mogila, thanks to the some golden objects, such as pectoral, ring or earrings. The similar situation was in case of tumulus of Kukuva Mogila (or Kukova Mogila) and Mushovitza Mogila, where many golden objects had been found. The sex of a person buried in tumulus of Lozarskata Mogila was not established. Because the body was cremated and so *per analogiam* with other tumuli, the burial was interpreted as female. The rich female burial was also interpreted in the tumulus of Mogilanskata Mogila in the town of Wratza in North West part of Bulgaria (Venedikov 1966; Венедиков 1966a; Венедиков 1966b; Николов 1967).

Only in the last 20 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the new look on the rich Thracian burials (with golden or silver objects) were presented, mainly thanks to A. Fol (Фол 1983) and Georgi Kitov. These scholars presented the opinion that the sex of a buried person was not connected with the found objects only because some luxury goods (such as earrings) could be the part of ceremonial sight of the ruler. Aleksandar Fol then criticized the opinion said that women were buried together with such luxury goods as in case of men – and that similar great buried ceremonies were held. And so he negated the opinion on sex of persons buried in Duvanli. On the other hand the well known Bulgarian scholar M. Tacheva was sceptical as to the opinion of A. Fol (Тачева 1994). As the rich female burials in the area of ancient Thrace are interpreted as the burials under tumulus in Kalamen (tumulus No I, grave No 2) (Тотев 1965; Дремсизова-Нелчинова 1970; Русева 2002,

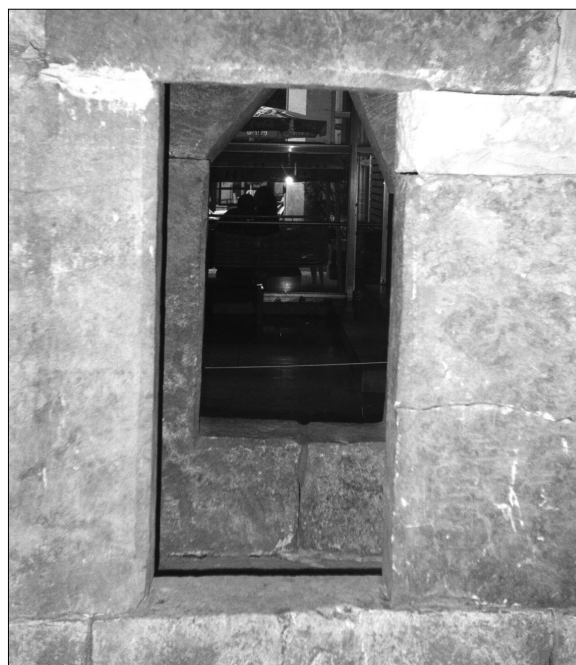
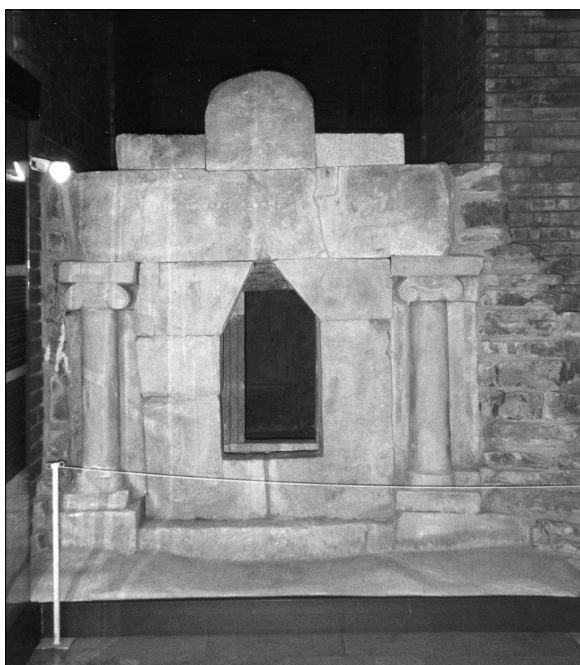


Photo 1-2. Smjadovo – the tomb construction from the tumulus No 47.

87), Staroselka (Василева 1971; Тачева-Хитова 1971; Русева 2002, 102-103) or the tumulus No XI from Seuthopolis. Some scholars, after the detailed studies on luxury goods found inside tumulus in the area of ancient Thrace, presented the opinion which can be put just between the above-mentioned. This is the opinion that the rich objects were used both by men and women who belonged to the tribal aristocracy (Димитрова 1989, 11). On the one hand we can not ignore the fact that the iconographical data from the little younger objects such as well known frescoes from Kazanlak tomb or objects from the treasure of Panagurishte show that the luxury goods were the sign of women from aristocracy or the court ladies (Тонкова 2002, 494). On the other hand, the luxury goods found for instance in the tumulus of Golemani near the town of Veliko Tarnovo clearly testify the opinion that it was the burial of a men, as testified the other objects such as arms or anthropological analysis of the skeleton. And so, as the kind of conclusion we can present the opinion that the golden or silver objects were buried by Thracians as the sign of ruler's power (or his closest persons) (Тонкова 2002, 494). And so, its significance was much greater than only a luxury things in modern times.

The very important information on the rich female burials, which were sometimes made in ancient

Thrace, was presented by the very beautiful stone tomb of Smjadovo (photo 1-2) – the tumulus No 47 (Атанасов 2002). Thanks the inscription we know that inside was certainly buried a women named Gonimasedze. And so, in this one case we can (in almost 100% certainty) establish the sex of a buried person as women, for whom such the luxury tomb was made. This fact enables us to say that perhaps sometimes woman in ancient Thrace were buried in very rich mode.

In summary, we can not say that the remnants inside the tumulus of Opalchenetz were certainly female, what earlier was assumed with certainty – thanks to the objects found inside the tomb. The information collected during the past 80 years enable us to mention that we know at least one example of a rich female burial. But on the other hand the rich objects were found also inside the man's tombs. Undoubtedly, the tumulus of Opalchenetz is very important (instead of very scarce information on it), because it enrich our knowledge on the artistic shape amongst the Thracian tribal aristocracy (Китов 2005 а). The fact that some information had to be verified after some time is connected with the archaeological investigations conducted on Balkan Peninsula. Some reinterpretation of an older discoveries enable sometimes to clarify some details and to put some new questions, which can put in doubt some earlier notions or hypothesis.

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### **Tumulul tracic de la Opalchenetz – 80 de ani mai târziu (Unele observații cu privire la înmormântările bogate de femei în Thracia antică)**

#### *Rezumat*

Tumulul se află 3 km est de satul Opalchenetz (Bulgaria) și a fost investigat cu 80 de ani în urmă. Aici a fost descoperit un mormânt care conținea un bogat inventar funerar, printre care și o pectorală din aur. Deși nu a fost făcută analiza antropologică a defunctului, în baza pieselor descoperite s-a constatat că este vorba despre o înmormântare feminină.

Subiectul legat de înmormântările feminine bogate se află de mai mult timp în discuție, nefiind găsită până în prezent o soluție clară. În prima jumătate a sec. XX unele înmormântări bogate, ca cele de la Davanlij (din apropierea or. Plovdiv), Kukova Mogila ș.a. au fost considerate feminine. În anii '80 ai secolului trecut Alexandr Fol era de părerea că în Thracia antică nu au existat înmormântări bogate feminine și nici ceremonii funerare legate de acestea. Prezența în morminte a unor podoabe feminine de înaltă calitate era interpretată de Al. Fol ca ceva legat de cultul ritual al regelui. În aceste condiții înmormântările, atribuite anterior femeilor, au început a fi considerate bărbătești („regale”).

Ulterior, în tumulul de la Smjadovo a fost descoperită o cameră funerară cu un bogat inventar și cu inscripții, din care rezultă clar că este vorba despre o înmormântare feminină. Aceasta permite admiterea ipotezei despre existența înmormântărilor bogate de femei. În acest context, peste 80 de ani putem reveni la mormântul din tumulul de la Opalchenetz, inventarul căruia nu dădea un răspuns concret la întrebarea cine a fost acolo înmormântat: o femeie bogată sau un rege.

### **Фракийский курган из Опълченец – 80 лет спустя (некоторые замечания в связи с богатыми женскими погребениями в античной Фракии)**

Курган находится в 3 км восточнее села Опълченец (Болгария) и был раскопан 80 лет тому назад. Обнаруженное в нём богатое захоронение включало остатки человеческого скелета и погребальный инвентарь, среди которого помимо других предметов находилась золотая пектораль. Хотя не был сделан антропологический анализ, захоронение по составу сопровождающих предметов было идентифицировано как женское. Проблема богатых женских погребений в античной Фракии достаточно долгое время остаётся дискуссионной и пока не имеющей ясного ответа. Первоначально отдельные богатые захоронения, как Даванлий (неподалеку от г. Пловдив) или открытое позднее Кукува Могила (и другие), ещё в первой половине XX ст. были отнесены к женским погребениям. В 80-е гг. XX ст. Александр Фол высказал мнение, что в античной Фракии не было богатых женских захоронений и связанных с ними погребальных церемоний. Он полагал, что входящие в состав богатого инвентаря высококлассные украшения престижного характера случайно принадлежали женщинам, и могли быть элементами ритуальной культуры царя, а не только принадлежать женщинам. И тогда в тех некоторых погребениях, которые были причислены к женским, могли быть захоронены мужчины-владельцы. Однако в одном из курганов Болгарии (село Смядово) была обнаружена великолепная гробница с надписями, из которых совершенно точно известно, что там была погребена именно женщина. Отсюда можно заключить, что в античной Фракии существовали богатые женские погребения, хотя их количество, вероятно, было невелико.

На основе всего вышеизложенного можно через 80 лет по-новому взглянуть на погребение из кургана Опълченец, богатый инвентарь которого сам по себе не даёт ответа на вопрос – кто был там похоронен: богатая женщина или царь-владелец.

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