

The Valley of the Thracian Rulers (I)

Georgi Kitov*

Tumuli are one of the proofs for the historical presence of the Thracian tribes in the Balkans. Until recently they were regarded just as burial mounds. The architectural monuments constructed under the tumuli were regarded only as tombs. The recent investigations, especially in the regions of Strelcha, Sveshtari, Ravnogor, Kazanlak, Starosel, Aleksandrovo, etc. require us to reconsider the representative structures under the tumuli and to regard them as temples, where kings and great representatives of the Thracian aristocracy were buried. This paper states the equality of the terms tomb, mausoleum and temple in contrast to a common tomb.

The unusual density of temples constructed and covered by a tumuli and along with very rich graves in the region of Kazanlak as well as the existence of Seutopolis - the capital of king Seutes III - required us to name the region the Valley of the Thracian rulers after the discoveries of the Thracological Expedition for Tumulus Investigation (TEMP) during the campaigns of 1992-99. The team discovered for the first time 2 unlooted Thracian royal tombs, 8 monumental temples made of stone and bricks and dozens of rich graves. Together with Seutopolis, the Kazanlak and Maglizh tombs known before, they proved that the Valley was one of the centers of the Thracian political and cultural history.

Two of the temples - the ones under Goljama Arsenalka and the Griffins' tumuli - are very similar to each other. They both have a rectangular shape with a gabled roof, round domed chambers and ritual beds. The latter has a long dromos, additionally narrowed. Its façade is topped by a gable with plastic decoration.

The temple in Helvetia tumulus is made of stone blocks, the walls and the floors (partially), the ante-chamber and the chamber are plastered with mortar. The roof is arch-shaped, intercepted

with a horizontal band. The two stone doors to the premise were found *in situ*.

The temple under Shushmanets tumulus is completely preserved and is a masterpiece of the Thracian architecture. Its dromos looks more like a small yard, the ante-chamber has a barrel-vaulted roof supported by a column and a capital shaped as a knucklebone. Four horses and two dogs are buried there. The chamber is round, its dome supported by a Doric column, there are three articulated horizontal bands on the walls and a ritual bed opposite to the entrance. The gable on the façade is damaged. The entrance to the round chamber is topped by a gable with plastic decoration. The walls and the floors are plastered with mortar, two or three layers at places.

The temple in Ostrusha tumulus is rectangular in plan, divided into five rectangular and one round chamber. The central chamber is solid and resembles a sarcophagus. Its ceiling is divided into several dozens of fields, in some of them marvelous paintings are still preserved. One of the chambers was not plundered and yielded a horse skeleton with a complete set of splendidly decorated with stylized animal images silver appliques and adornments for horse-trappings, phiale and a jug of silver, a fragmented pectoral-collared from iron and silver with gilding, decorated with floral and geometric designs.

The first four temples are probably from one group, which functioned in the second half of the 5th and the 4th century BC. The Ostrusha temple was added to the group in the early 4th century BC. The rest of the temples, tombs and some of the rich graves are going to be presented in part II of this paper. Part II is also going to be an attempt to summarize the possible canons for Thracian architecture constructed and then covered by a tumulus and the related ritual practices.