

Unknown Thracian rock sanctuary in south Dobruja

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Badly preserved remains of an ancient fortification can still be seen nowadays in the easternmost part of the rocky peninsula Otluburun, 2 km to the south-southeast from Hrabrovo, Dobrich district. Its dating is uncertain and has usually been attributed in older publications either to the Roman period, or to the Late Antiquity. Important stray finds and recent field surveys have added much to the understanding of the site and necessitate a new, rather different from the traditional one, interpretation of the registered archaeological structures.

The already suggested pre-Roman stage in occupation of the site is now securely proven. It has been established that a Thracian rock sanctuary, in which the solar cult seems to have been practiced, did exist in those times in the Otluburun locality. Two well-preserved grooves of specific shape, each of them with a strict astronomical orientation, belong to the ritual infrastructure of that sanctuary. They are cut with amazing precision at different places, on the very rim of the sheer rocky slopes of the peninsula. The archaeological material dates the origins of the sanctuary to the end of the Late Bronze Age. Its blossoming forth coincides with the Early Iron and the beginning of the Late Iron Age. In the last centuries of the 1st millennium BC the sanctuary ceased functioning.

In the Late Roman period a large unforti-

fied settlement came into being in the Otluburun locality. It occupied the western half of the peninsula and spread further to the northwest, beyond its natural limits. The evidence of habitation during the Late Roman period within the fortified area in the easternmost part of the peninsula is obviously to be considered as closely related to the historical fate of that settlement. The simple architectural design and the application of a primitive building technique convincingly prove the emergency nature of the fortification. From functional point of view, it should be defined as a refugium: a fortress built in a hurry by the local population during a critical situation, which must have arose in the region in the second half of the 4th or in the beginning of the 5th century AD. However, the building activity in Late Roman times might well have been reduced to certain repairs and bringing into functional suitability of a much older fortification, which had been constructed at that place already in the 1st millennium BC to defend the sanctuary.

Although the commentary is based only on field surveys, the newly discovered rock sanctuary near Hrabrovo fills in a substantial gap in the study of Thracian megalithic culture in south Dobruja. Now it is already possible to date with great confidence the beginning of its formation to the end of the Late Bronze Age, at the latest.