

## **Thracian Tombs: Mausoleums, temples, *Heroons*? Part II**

(Abstract)

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The second part of the present paper discusses problems of tomb interpretation in Thracian milieu and suggests a reconstruction of the rituals performed in the chamber, but also on the outside – in the area in front of the entrance and in the mound. The aim here is to define the rites within the whole spectrum of possible variations: tomb cults, hero cults, rites of passage? Probably, the answer would be different for each tomb and most probably depended on the social status of the deceased who was to be ‘transcended’ into the Great Beyond by means of specific ritual activities.

Inhumation dominated in the tombs, in contrast to grave burials where a clear preference for cremation is documented in Thrace. The aboveground position of the chamber is underlined by laying the body on a kline. Such a tradition can be traced back to the dolmens, where the body was placed on ground, but not buried. This was also the case with rock-cut tombs in the Eastern Rhodopes, where there were no pits to bury the body but instead in the interior of some of them there were carved beds. The study offers an analysis of two major ideas about the kline. The first is related to the role of the bed and the sleep in everyday life, whereby death is considered as falling asleep, as the soul is leaving the body in scenes of ekphora and prothesis known from Greek monuments. The second emphasizes the use of the bed/kline in feasts and the concept of felicity that is usually associated with these scenes – the so-called funerary feast or more precisely the ‘heroic symposium’. The latter implies a high status in the kingdom of death and this is the interpretation assumed here for the Thracian tombs.

A detailed analysis is offered of the

rituals performed outside the chamber. These include traces of activities – ritual pits and hearths found in the mound, considered a testimony to the continuous communing with the dead. The monumental façades and ante-chambers, especially of the tombs in Chetinyova Mogila and Shushmanets, are offered as an additional support for the existence of such practices. It is disputable, however, whether these practices could be defined as a heroic cult instead of ‘transitional rituals’, aiming at acquiring a new status – deification, a peculiar transformation of the dead ruler to an anthropodaimon.

A thorough answer to the question of tomb interpretation should include the definition of the tomb as a heroon. While, in the context of the polis, a mausoleum is bound to the historical memory and requires an architectural façade to treasure the memory of the dead political leader, in Thrace the situation is completely different. As the tombs are situated outside settlements and covered with mounds, they imply some activity of the dead aristocrats, some sort of psycho-somatic immortality that preserves the human character of the dead, but enriched with a divine nature. Careful analysis of the written sources and the archaeological evidence that are primarily related to the ‘epic’ memory of an illiterate society provides us with the concept of the anthropodaimon. Thus, the tomb resembles the Greek concept of a heroon as a grave-temple for the dual nature of the heroized dead, who preserves his human activities in the tomb-house, but also possesses a divine nature, for which reason the tomb is also a tomb-temple, where certain rites are taking place in order to ensure his protection as a mediator with the world of the Gods.