

Early Bronze Age collective inhumation grave at Sabrano near Nova Zagora (Abstract)

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The present report is dedicated to an Early Bronze age collective grave in Thrace. The funerary structure is a pit dug into the ground that is rectangular in plan with rounded corners. The fill consists of dark brown compacted soil with small pebbles. Four individuals were buried in the pit, three of them laid side by side. Two bodies were placed lying on their backs with bent knees (A, B), and the third one is half turned to the left, also with bent knees (C). The remains of the fourth individual are not in anatomical order (D).

Seven ceramic vessels were discovered in the structure, serving as grave goods – a pot-like vase, two deep dishes and four jugs. Five of them were placed above the skulls of skeletons 1A and 1B, some 10-20 cm to the east of them. The other two vases were unearthed in immediate proximity to and under the skull of 1C.

The burial rite attested by the grave at Sabrano has closest parallels with several graves of the plain necropolis at Bereketskata Mogila at Stara Zagora. Other similar, but tumular graves, were excavated under Kurdova Mogila at the former village of Malka Detelina, near Radnevo, and Gabrova Mogila at the village of Kamen, near Sliven. Beyond Southeastern Thrace, a similar grave was investigated in Gorolomova Koriya locality at Smyadovo, near Shumen.

Most of the above-listed graves with more than two individuals belong to the Early

Bronze Age and more specifically to its first stage that corresponds to Ezero A phase. Such a date is provided also by the ceramic vases in the grave at Sabrano. They have close parallels among vessels from graves in Bereketskata Mogila necropolis and from Golyamata Mogila at Golyama Detelina, near Radnevo. Such vases and fragments of them were discovered in the earliest levels (XIII-X) of Tell Ezero.

The absolute dating of the grave, made in the framework of TOPOI Project – Skeleton D, Ox A 22950: 3091 – 2921 (95.4 probability) and Skeleton A, Ox A 23078: 3093 – 2920 (95.4 probability) – placing the complex in the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, corresponds exactly with the above mentioned relative chronological limits and allows for narrowing them to a about a century.

According to the number of individuals, buried simultaneously in the grave (at least three), the grave could be termed “collective”. The analysis of the burial rite and the adduced parallels indicate that the tradition of burying more than two individuals in the same grave is attested and spreads in present-day Bulgaria in the early period of the Bronze Age, and more precisely in its first phase. It is attested both in tumular and plain necropoleis. Similar collective graves (tumular and plain) are known from earlier periods (from the middle of the 5th to the late 4th millennium BC) to the northeast of present-day Bulgaria – in Azov-Pontic steppes.