

Tumular grave from the Roman Period at Dragodanovo near Sliven (Abstract)

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The double authorship of the present article – by the archaeologist who investigated the tumulus, and by an expert in the Ancient East – was provoked by an unusual amulet of eastern origin that was discovered in a closed Thracian context – a grave in a tumulus, dated to the early 2nd c. AD. The object was made several centuries before it was deposited as a grave good of a noble Thracian priest and healer in the Roman Period.

In August 2010, a complete archaeological investigation was made of Krastava Mogila tumulus. A central grave was discovered, along with four ritual platforms and a fireplace. In the southeastern part of the tumulus, an individual was cremated in a single-stepped pit, dug in the ground. Three groups of grave goods could be distinguished. The first one comprises the personal ornaments of the noble Thracian man or woman – a plate with no image, a lunula, a massive earring, and a finger ring with a carnelian intaglio with the depiction of a bee. The second group comprises bronze and clay vases of various shapes and dimensions. They are united by the fact that all of them are related to libations and/or washing before, during and/or after carrying out the rituals. Among these, there are at least three ceramic pitchers and three bronze basins of different size. One is a tripod basin and it could have been used as a podanipter or a cauldron. Each leg is shaped as a sphinx with four lion paws, firmly standing on a pedestal – a large lion paw. The third group of grave goods comprises various beads, amulets, small cult objects and a bronze mirror. These are the so-called “Zagreus toys” – according to the myth, the child Zagreus played with them and was looking at himself in a mirror, when the Titans tore him in seven parts. All these items were used by the buried individual for rituals, probably

related to divination. Thus, they reveal the priestly functions that the individual had in the Thracian society in the Roman period.

It was discovered that on the flat side of one of the beads, shaped as a scaraboid and with an opening for a string, there is an engraved scene. In the field, a male figure is depicted standing in profile to the right in front of an altar. The sacerdotal functions are emphasized by a scepter and a diamond. The iconography of the scene is of eastern origin. It follows a model, the emergence of which should be sought for back in the millennia, with examples as the late 3rd millennium BC seal of the priest Hashhamer from Sumer, or the stela of King Melišihu of the Babylonian Kassite Dynasty from the 12th c. BC.

The burial is dated with a silver coin of Emperor Trajan, minted in 103 or 104 AD. Immediately after the cremation, to the south of it, post-burial activities took place, related to a ritual feast on a level platform, in the center of which a fireplace was made of stone slabs.

Generally, the grave in Krastava Mogila could be dated to the very beginning of the 2nd c., but it also contains heirlooms that were used for a long time. As the human remains are not sufficient for an anthropological analysis, it is impossible to specify the sex of the individual that mastered the sacred knowledge of the ancient Thracians, passed down orally among the adepts. The second part offers a detailed analysis of the scene on the amulet. Numerous parallels are adduced from the greatest museums in the world that allow for a date in the Neo-Babylonian or the Achaemenid Period, 6th-4th c. BC.

It is unclear, however, when and on what occasion the amulet was acquired by the priestly dynasty, a representative of which was buried in Krastava Mogila at the village of Dragodanovo near Sliven.