

Excavations at the Svetitsa tumulus, near Shipka

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The tumulus is about 2.5 km to the southeast of the town of Shipka, in the Valley of the Thracian rulers. Its name comes from a medicinal spring, which was being used as a sanctuary since the Thracian period until present.

A sarcophagus-like grave was built of stones in a large pit dug into the already completed tumulus. A clay pithos was found on both sides of the grave. The burial was made in the second half of the 5th century BC following „the Orphic tradition“. After dismembering the body, only parts of the legs and the head were placed on the floor as well as a number of goods, which were considered necessary for the afterlife. Some of them were broken into pieces similar to the body. Besides the complete silver cup, which resembles a phiale but with a flat base and two handles, the grave contains eleven more handles and three ring bases of silver vessels. A bronze hydria has only two handles and there are three other handles, a base and a rim belonging to missing vessels, which have probably been buried somewhere else.

A solid golden phiale/mask was put in the place of the head, the first of its kind in Thrace. It differs from the Mycenaean and Macedonian masks, first because it is several times their

weight, and also with the image itself, which portrays the face of a „real“ person with a severe, even cruel expression which at the same time reflects a moment of supreme bliss. A golden signet ring bears the carved figure of a resting athlete.

The grave goods also include parts of the armor and clay vessels. The bronze armor-plate consists of two main parts, and a big number of binding parts; the elements protecting the neck, arms, stomach and buttocks were also attached to the armor. The two swords and several spear-heads are made of iron and the 144 arrowheads are made of bronze.

Two clay amphorae were placed in the south-east corner of the grave. There are two red-figure one-handled jugs with round necks decorated with red human figures and floral motifs. The peculiarities of the style reveal vase painters of the Attic school and attest that the vases were typical for the second half of the 5th century BC, the same time when the burial has been made.

The sarcophagus-like grave in the Svetitsa tumulus is one of the richest burials in this region and in Thrace; a fact, which gives us reasons to believe that a local ruler was buried there.