

THE DOMED TOMBS NEAR THE VILLAGE OF RAVNOGOR IN THE RHODOPES*

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The village of Ravnogor¹ is situated high in the Rhodope mountains (1300 m above sea level). About twenty burial mounds, up to 4-5 m high, distributed in three groups, are dispersed all over the slanting slopes and the almost flat places to the East and to the South.² The eastern group includes 5 tumuli, the southern 12, and the southwestern 3. In August 1987, 10 tumuli were completely excavated (nos. I, II, III, IV, VI, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII).³ Only two of them (nos. I and IX) were average in height, while the rest was hardly visible, being almost completely destroyed by erosion and agricultural activities.

No traces of either grave or any other ritual constructions were discovered in the filling of tumuli nos. IV and XI (less than 0.8 m high). In mound III a small hearth was investigated, where pieces of metal and clay objects, as well as some human bones were found. The burial rite was cremation *in situ*, so all the grave implements were fully destroyed. The fragments show that some pieces of armaments were consecrated: knives, maybe a shield, etc. Three of the other tumuli (nos. VIII, X, XII) revealed cremations as well, on piles of stones. The filling of mound VIII consisted of slabs, different in kind and size, among which a great number of fragments from various clay vessels were scattered, dating from the middle of the 1st millennium BC. The grave platform in tumulus X was flat, surrounded by two stone rings lying on different levels. The lower one consisted of white stones, carefully selected and brought from afar. The upper ring was of grey rock pieces, lying everywhere under the humus in the vicinity. Only a small spiral of thick bronze wire was preserved among the grave furnishings.

* Translation from Bulgarian Maya Vassileva, editing of the English version FCW.

¹ Situated 16 km south of the town of Brazigovo, in the northern part of the western Rhodopes.

² X. и К. Шкорпил, *Могили* (Пловдив 1898) 10. In the archaeological literature the village is known only in connection with the golden medallion found here, see note 5 below.

A symbolic burial in a small stone grave was discovered in the hardly visible tumulus VI. The gifts were two clay cups, a big clay vessel, several glass beads and a silver coin in good state of preservation, minted at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd century BC in Istieia on Euboea. And this should determine the approximate date of the grave. In the filling a solid silver bracelet was found, dating from the same period.

Two pits, dug into the rock, beneath a large pyre, were disclosed in tumulus II (1.2 m high). A set of decorations for horsetrappings was found in each of the pits. These include appliques of gilded silver, artistically ornamented with human and animal figures, floral and geometric patterns.⁴ One of the sets was very well preserved. It consisted of 7 round and one elongated (a head piece) appliques, about a hundred silver beads and a lot of fragments of leather straps. The appliques represent the busts of Athena, Nike, Artemis and an unidentified deity with a beautiful face, wings, ivy leaves and skin with hoofs. The round decorations date back to the 2nd century BC and show a remote connection with the only find previously known from Ravnogor—the round golden plate with embossed image of a siamese twin sphinx, discovered at the beginning of our century.⁵ The last two mounts (nos. I and IX) turned out to cover the ruins of two domed tombs. They are the only examples of this type of tomb, known so far in Bulgaria, which are

³ The excavations were incidentally caused by the attempt of an Experimental station for seed production at Ravnogor to flatten the field. The machine driver responsible for the job came upon a stone construction. Then the author of this paper was appointed chief of the investigations. The work was financed by the Experimental Station—Ravnogor, the County municipality of Brazigovo and the Council of Culture—Pazardzik.

⁴ Г. Китов, *Свещени дарове в тракийска могила край Равногор в Роговите, Изкуство* (1988) 7, where the idea is defended that the origin of the finds was connected with the customary burial of "sacred gifts" (= bothros), usually interpreted in the literature as treasures, cf. Д. Гергова, *Съкровищата на Тракия и Хиперборейският мит, Втори международен конгрес по българистика. Доклади 6. Българските земи в древността. България през Средновековието* (София 1987) 53-73.

⁵ В. Filov, *L'art antique en Bulgarie* (Sofia 1925) 15, fig. 10; the author dated the medallion to the end of the 6th century BC. This date is confirmed by И. Венедиков, Т. Герасимов, *Тракийското изкуство* (София 1973) 372. Г. Китов, *Стилевая характеристика памятников фракийского искусства с зооморфными изображениями, Pulpudiva 3* (Sofia 1980) 171. The importance of this find is still not fully realized. The medallion is kept in the National Museum of Archaeology at Sofia (inv. no. A 4175). Nothing is known about it except that it has been bought by some R. Levi in the beginning of our century.

situated so high in the mountains,⁶ and besides they have the longest diameter of all circular chamber tombs. Because of their significance, I would like to discuss in detail their characteristic features and relationship to similar constructions found in Thrace.

Tumulus I, containing tomb no. 1, is the most southwestern one of the group it belongs to. It had been disturbed in the past. The approximate dimensions were: height 4/5 m; diameter 20/25 m.

The domed chamber was situated in the centre of the mound. It was connected with the periphery by a long corridor leading to the South-East. The tomb and the corridor walls, which were structurally connected, lie on the in southern direction slightly sloping rocky terrace. The coves in the rock were filled up with small slab-like stones. The substructure lies at a depth of 0.2-0.5 m and is built of stone slabs, sticking out some 5 to 10 cm above ground level. The faces of these stones are flat. As for the superstructure, the same kind of slabs were used to build the chamber, while the corridor was made of well-worked sand-stone blocks.

The domed chamber is circular in form. Its diameter, measuring 5.26-5.40 m, ranks it as the largest circular chamber tomb known so far in Bulgaria. The stone slabs for its construction are of local origin. They were arranged in layers from 6 up to 21 cm in thickness. Their length is up to 70-80 cm. The layers were generally leveled, but because of the characteristic building material sometimes a layer tended to split up in two in which case one was forced to take recourse to additional patchwork by small stones to keep the level. The first 2-3 layers of the superstructure (15-20 cm) were vertical and the dome itself begins above this level. Up to a height of 1.6 m the dome was formed by inwards slanting of the faced slabs. After this, it was based on the stepped principle, according to which every next layer was placed 5-1 cm more inwards. Twenty-two layers could be distinguished when looking from the inside; the last layer was 9 cm slanting inwards and thus sticking out most of all. The highest preserved part of the wall was 2.9 m, but above the height of 2.3 m the inner face was destroyed. If we follow the curve of the wall so far established, it can be estimated that the dome originally measured up to about 4 m in height. If there existed a bee-hive curve before the covering stone (as it is the case with the Kazanlak tomb), or if the curve followed the pattern of the Mezek tomb running straightly vertical in the centre, the height could have been 4.5-4.8 m.

⁶ One domed chamber tomb, built of slabs, has been discovered more than 50 years ago near the village of Lyaskovo, situated 1,150 m above sea-level, И. Венедиков, Из гънките на Родопите, *Българска мисъл* 7 (1934) VI-VII, 418.

The covering stone was found fallen on the floor of the chamber. It was oval in shape and its largest diameter reached 2 m.

The outer faces of the chamber, as well as those of the corridor were carefully built. The tomb had not been planned to be covered by a mound. The measures taken for strengthening the construction demonstrate that one did not trust the supporting role of the earth filling. The thickness of the wall increased to the top side from 2 to 2.5 m, so the outer curve of the dome is much more rounded than the inner one.

The floor of the chamber was covered with slabs of the same kind as those used in the construction. Only several of them were found *in situ*, close to the walls. The padding between the faces of the walls is made of slabs, different in form and size. It was apparently tried to keep it in line with the level of the corresponding layer of the walls. The levelling itself was achieved by large splinters left over from the working of the faced stones.

The entrance of the chamber was in the South-East. The doorstep was formed by a well-worked lime-stone block, measuring 0.38 x 0.43 x 0.95 m, with two tooth-like juts facing inwards. It was lying on the floor level, which was one and the same in the chamber and in the dromos. The edges of the door-step were quite worn off because of the frequent visiting of the tomb in the past. The sides of the entrance were formed by blocks with grooves on their inner edges for door-fittings. It was covered by an enormous stone slab (0.22 x 1.21 x 1.55 m), with a hole (6 cm in diameter, 5.5 cm deep) above the groove in the southern side stone for the axis of a wooden door. The entrance was trapezium-shaped, 1 m wide on the lower side and 0.8 m wide on the upper side; its height measured 1.55 m. The dromos was 5.15 m long. The inner faces of its walls were built of large stone blocks, while the outer ones were of the same type of slabs as used for the construction of the chamber. The walls were 1.2 m thick and well preserved only in the part next to the chamber. In the South-East remnants of the walls were preserved, measuring up to 0.5 m in height at their face sides. The floor of the corridor and the place in front of it were of trampled sandy soil. Traces of secondary ditches were too slim to be certain about them.

The interior of the chamber was completely filled up with fallen slabs from the roof, whereas in the dromos there were only a few of them.

Three cultural layers could be distinguished in the chamber after cleaning the fallen roof-slabs. These layers were most clearly detectable in the zones of two hearths. Both the layer formed while the tomb was in use and the implements connected with this phase were destroyed by robbers. Critical analysis of the stratigraphical data allows us to reconstruct the "life" of the tomb in detail. Three main periods can thus be distin-

guished: (1) construction and proper use of the tomb as a place of burial, ending up with robbery of the inventory; (2) secondary use as a place of shelter; (3) final destruction.

The sondages in the vicinity of the tomb showed that the locality (named "Chemerikata") had not been inhabited before or after the formation of the necropole. The horizon showing traces of human occupation was formed as a result of stone-working on the spot for the construction of the tomb, and traceable only in the immediate surrounding of the tomb. It contained large stone pieces, measuring about 2-3 cm in thickness. Apparently, the terrain was leveled and covered with 2-3 cm of sandy soil after the building-phase. The absence of stone pieces in higher levels, as well as the existence of an outer face of the construction, indicate that the tomb had been devised as an open-air edifice. If not, one should have expected to find several layers of stone pieces, in parallel, horizontal or slanting position, outside the tomb, as it was the case with tomb no. 2 and some other Thracian domed tombs.⁷ Besides, one should not have expected the building-stratum to have purposely been covered with well-trampled soil marking the level. Unfortunately, no finds relevant for dating purposes were discovered in or immediately above this layer of trampled sandy soil.

After a period of uncertain length the tomb was covered by an earth mount. Most likely this was provoked by the severe mountain climate which accelerated erosion processes in the outer walls being constructed of not so durable material and without the use of mortar. The mere fact that the tomb is covered by a tumulus indicates the care taken for its preservation. In addition, the existence of a door to the chamber, the worn off state of the threshold, the long dromos and some other circumstances already observed,⁸ point to the definition of the tomb as a mausoleum.⁹ There was no door in the corridor leading to the chamber. It was entirely, or at least as far as its southeastern part is concerned, uncovered. It is possible that the walls of the dromos were sloping downwards in the direction away from the chamber, as it happens to be the case with some comparable tombs.¹⁰ The chamber, apparently intended for regular visits as indicated above, shows signs of rituals the

⁷ This is absolutely certain for the tomb at Strelcha.

⁸ Г. Китов, Тракийската гробница-мавзолей край град Стрелча, *Векове* 1977, 1, 12 и сл.

⁹ The term "tomb-mausoleum" has been proposed by me about 10 years ago (Kitov, note 8 above, p. 12) and, as it did not meet serious opposition (even though I realize that it does not render the idea entirely satisfactory), I will continue to use it until a more suitable alternative comes up.

¹⁰ Л. Живкова, *Казанлъшката гробница* (София 1974) 18, обр. 2.

nature of which we will discuss another time. Once they had passed the corridor, the visitors reached the part covered by an enormous slab just in front of a wooden door, decorated with iron nails. Then they had to step on the stone threshold and bend their heads and bodies before entering the impressively large chamber. All this had a psychological effect purposely looked for by the designers. The furnishing of the chamber no doubt had been in accordance with this purpose and will probably have been no less impressive in form and dimensions. Unfortunately, almost nothing of the furnishing remains, which makes the task of dating the construction a hopeless one. It is well-known, though, that architectural features and building techniques are not particularly reliable dating criteria in the case of Thracian domed tombs. In addition, multiple use of the tombs deprives the other archaeological material from its dating qualities as well. Apart from the objects mentioned previously, a lot of pottery sherds were found in the immediate surrounding of tomb no. 1 near the village of Ravnogor. These were scattered over different layers as a result of later disturbances. They could positively be assigned to the period from the end of the 4th century BC to the middle of the 1st century AD, which, according to my opinion, corresponds to the time of the building of the tomb until the downfall of its dome at the end of the first phase in its "lifetime". If correct, the construction of the tomb most probably took place near the end of the 4th century BC or in the beginning of the 3rd century BC. Later on, the tomb functioned as a mausoleum and perhaps received some extra burials.

The three layers inside the chamber cover the time from the robbery till the collapse of the dome. The lowest of them was lying on the bare rock and contains a stone mixture from the floor padding, a small amount of soil, pieces of clay vessels, sherds of a pithos, and a golden loop from a medallion.¹¹ The layer was covered by a film of ashes and charcoal, most substantial in the centre of the chamber and diminishing towards the sides, which is quite normal when a fire has been burning in the centre of the room. In this layer were discovered sherds of earthenware, some probably from the same pithos mentioned above,¹² heads of iron nails (from the decoration of the door),¹³ and a bronze coin of Tiberius (14-37

¹¹ Flat, very well preserved. Ivy leaves pointing in one and the same direction are incised on the front side; on the back side there is a thick layer of silver solder, diameter 2.3-2.4 cm.

¹² The fragments were from different vessels, including the so-called "Thracian grey pottery" as well as more refined products of the Roman era.

¹³ Heavily oxidized, burnt, with convex round heads (diameter 0.3-0.4 cm), with bright brown colouring at the concave surface because of contact with unburnt wood.

AD).¹⁴ The film was accumulated from the time of the robbery onwards. The coin of Tiberius not only allows for its exact dating, but also enables us to synchronize the change in use of the chamber with the Thracian revolt in the year 21 AD.¹⁵ Evidently, after the suppression of the revolt the Romans reached this highland region and broke into the tomb which was still functioning as a mausoleum or sanctuary—at least there were no traces of any attempt to cover up the entrance to the corridor. The tomb was then totally plundered. Even the slabs of the floor were smashed. Subsequently, the tomb was used as a shelter for some time and fires burnt in the chamber. The wooden door was used to feed the fires: only the iron nails remained as silent witnesses of this. Some of the clay vessels were taken out of the chamber and, after their contents had been checked, thrown to pieces on the platform in front of the corridor, where we found what was left of them. At that time the bronze coin got into the fireplace, either accidentally or, if we may assume that modern treasure hunters follow an ancient tradition, after having intentionally been thrown in the fire.¹⁶ Above the remains of the hearth a layer of sandy soil and pebbles had been formed, which contained small quantities of ash, charcoal and pottery sherds, and measured up to 10 cm in thickness. Maybe this was formed during a warm season, after which fires burnt over it again. The ashes were dispersed as a very slim film (about 2 mm) over the path of the corridor and the platform in front of the tomb. There was only one such layer, which shows that the period between the formation of the two thick layers of ashes was so short that it allowed no time for the natural deposition of an intermediate layer of soil in the corridor and the platform in front of the tomb. The layers were disturbed by a number of small ditches, which had been dug by later treasure hunters. Finally, the top layer was covered by the remains of the dome after its collapse, from which time onwards nobody could enter the chamber again.

The survey of the archaeological material in the chamber shows that the entire period of the use of the building in its various applications is

¹⁴ Covered with greyish-green patina. Round, thick. The seal slightly excentric. Face: male bust, in profile, beardless. Encircled by an inscription in left-to-right direction, reading: TIBERIOU KAI Opposite side: a woman dressed in long chiton, riding a bull in Amazon-sit to the right. Encircled by an inscription, reading: ΑΜΦΙΠΟΛΙ/ΤΩΝ/.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Annales* II, 64-67.

¹⁶ In tumulus I near Doirentzi the funeral pyre of the Late Hellenistic Period had been looted in the 1st century AD by means of an enormous ditch dug in the 1st century AD: a coin of Vespasian (69-79 AD) was found in the layer above the pyre, see Г. Китов, П. Павлов, Тракийски могили край Дойренци и Смочан в Ловешки окръг, *АОР* (Сливен 1985) 90.

represented: from its construction phase at the end of the 4th or beginning of the 3rd century BC up to the time of the robbery and its subsequent change into a place of shelter at the end of the first quarter of the 1st century AD. During the robbery and later diggings by treasure hunters old and more recent material were completely mixed, so that the respective periods were equally represented in all three layers distinguished.

Tumulus IX, in the filling of which tomb no. 2 was discovered, is the most southeastern of the group to which the previously discussed tomb also belongs, and is situated at about 600 m East of tumulus I. A large depression was visible in its centre. As we found out later, this resulted from an attempt to plunder the grave in ancient times, as well as from the use of the ruins as a quarry for worked stones up to 60-70 years ago.

The mound was raised on a relatively flat platform and its slopes were equally slanting. The existence of a domed tomb or any other construction here was not known before the excavations had started. We reached the wall of the chamber during drilling activities. After we had established that the wall of the tomb was only 1.2 m thick, we decided not to uncover the tomb from the outside.

Tomb no. 2 was not much different in plan from tomb no. 1. It consisted of a circular chamber and a long corridor leading to the South-East. The walls had no foundation, but were lying directly on the natural terrain; they were provided with inner and outer faces. The chamber and the dromos walls were structurally connected and built in the same way—from large, roughly hewn stone blocks cemented by mud.¹⁷ The layers of the walls were unequal and additionally patched up to the same level by slabs of local origin ("tikli") and splinters from the working of the stone blocks. The same material was used as filling for the space between the two faces of the wall.

The circular chamber had a diameter of 5.10-5.34 m, which ranks it second among the largest of all domed tombs investigated so far in Bulgaria (as we have seen, tumulus I contained the largest). Its walls were entirely preserved up to minimally the second, maximally the fifth layer, measuring 1.55 m at the highest point. The inner face was partly ruined. The outer face was in a much better state of preservation and at some points reached the otherwise unpreserved sixth layer, measuring up to 1.7 m high. The first two layers were placed along a vertical axis, above this level steplike vaulting started. The blocks were only slightly slanting inwards. The moderate curve thus established was not well preserved up to higher levels, so that firm calculations of the original

¹⁷ Length 0.9 m, height up to 0.6 m. The height of the individual layers varies between 0.2 and 0.45 m.

dimensions of the dome are difficult to give. Considering the larger size of the blocks and the fact that the walls were thinner, so that abrupt narrowing is precluded, we perhaps may assume that the chamber was higher than that of tomb no. 1 and reached 4.5-5 m. The inside floor was finished with a layer of sand, the remnants of which were only traceable at some places in the periphery. At the time of the looting of the tomb, the floor level was dug up and mixed with the soil of the old humus and the earth lying beneath it.

The outer faces of the chamber and the corridor walls were investigated with the help of drillings only. They resembled the inner ones. The walls were situated on a thick layer produced by the working of the stone blocks on the spot. At 0.4 m and 0.9 m above the original ground level there were placed three thin strips of stone pieces, touching the outer faces of the chamber and getting slimmer to the periphery of the mound. These testify to the fact that tomb no. 2, unlike that of no. 1, was covered by earth directly after the construction of part of the walls. It seems that tomb no. 2 is of later date and that bad experience with tomb no. 1, which, as we have seen, was initially left uncovered, can be held responsible for this measure. Similarity in plan and construction of the tomb to that of no. 1 indicates that this second edifice may also have been devised and used as a mausoleum.

The interior of the chamber was filled with fallen stone blocks and large slabs. It was impossible to identify the covering stone among these. Perhaps it had been replaced by a different system for closing consisting of more, but smaller slabs; parallels for such a system, though, are lacking.

The entrance to the chamber was formed in exactly the same way as that of tomb no. 1. The side stones had fallen and were missing. Their beds were well preserved in the, for that purpose, especially worked blocks of the side walls between chamber and corridor. The entrance and a large part of, or perhaps the whole, dromos were covered with slabs, now fallen into the doorway and the corridor. The bed of the missing threshold showed that it had been 0.37 m thick.

The entire length of the corridor measured 5.75 m. The walls were better preserved than those of the chamber, four to six layers of stones still being in position (1.30-1.75 m high). The walls suffered badly from the pressure of the filling and therefore the passage varies from 1 m to 1.32 m in width. The floor level here and in the chamber was unstable. The entrance to the corridor was blocked by several stone slabs, closely packed near the front faces of the side walls and apparently later dislocated. Thus, the entrance had probably been closed in a hurry whereas the robbers entered the tomb through its dome.

Unlike the case with tomb no. 1, the various periods in the lifetime of the tomb in tumulus IX could not be established. It was probably built later, and likewise functioned as a mausoleum for a long time. Similarly, it suffered looting during the Thracian revolt of the year 21 AD, at which time the corridor had already been closed and covered up with earth. Perhaps, stimulated by the loot from tumulus I, the robbers also directed their attention to the neighbouring larger mounds. Ditches in tumuli VII and XVI were still visible as large and deep holes. We do not know whether the treasure hunters did find graves here or any other constructions. But in tumulus IX they certainly came upon the dome. After their "visit", the chamber and the roof of the corridor collapsed, thus covering the messed up remains of the inventory: pottery sherds and fragments of one (or more than one) chain-knitted cuirass.¹⁸ The pottery was characteristic of the period from the late 4th/early 3rd century BC to the 1st century BC and represented the primary use of the tomb as a place for burial and a mausoleum. Among the blocks which had fallen down some modern material was found, which confirmed the information of the local inhabitants that the place had been used as a quarry for worked stones at the beginning of our century.

Up to the time of the discovery of the tombs near the village of Ravnogor the number of Thracian domed tombs known to us was 16, of which 14 were situated in present-day Bulgaria¹⁹ and the remainder in the

¹⁸ Pieces of chain-knitted iron armour were found in the corridor of tomb no. 1 too. These were of the same type; heavily oxidized, turned into a lump of iron. Having in mind that the chain-knitted armour appeared in Thrace during the Late Hellenistic Period, we must accept that these pieces belong to later burials. It is interesting to note that remains of chain-knitted iron armour have been reported in 1851 among the finds of the Rozovetz tomb, dated to the 5th century BC, see Б. Филов, *Надгробните могили при Дуванлий в Пловдивско* (София 1934) 159.

¹⁹ I have in mind the tombs of Rozovetz (see Filov, note 18 above, p. 158), Dolno Levski (В. Миков, *Произход на куполните гробници в Тракия*, *ИАИ* 19 (1955) 21), Lyaskovo (Velkov, note 6 above, p. 418), Mezek and Vulchepol (Б. Филов, *Куполните гробници при Мезек*, *ИАИ* 11 (1937) 1 ff. and 79 ff.), Malko Belovo (И. Велков, *Куполна гробница при с. Малко Белово*, *ГНАМ* 7 (1942)), Kazanlak (В. Миков, *Античната гробница при Казанлък* (София 1954)), Коринка (М. Чичикова, *Поява и употреба на тухлата като строителен материал у траките в края на IV и началото на III в. пр.н.е.*, *ИАИ* 21 (1957) 132), Yankovo (Ц. Дремсизова, *Надгробни могили при с. Янково, Коларовградско*, *ИАИ* 19 (1955) 6), Strelcha (Kitov, note 8 above, p. 12). I have in mind two unpublished tombs, one of which is near the village of Parvenetz; my personal views about this are ventilated here, with the kind permission of its investigator, B. Chaparov. The other unpublished tomb is situated near the town of Kavarna, in the northern part of the Chirakman cape, which I studied myself in 1972. The tomb is in a small tumulus. It has been built of crumbled

European part of Turkey.²⁰ The significance of the newly discovered tombs consists of their location high in the mountains, the dimensions of their chambers and the well-formed outer faces of their walls. Much to our regret, these as well as the other Thracian examples (except those at Kazanlak and at Strelcha) cannot be exactly dated. This hotly debated circumstance has been adequately explained by Al. Fol as a result of the fact that the tombs in question were repeatedly used and that only the implements connected with the last burial were preserved to some extent.²¹ The chronological scheme and interpretation of the domed tombs according to their plan and way of construction, proposed more than 30 years ago, is so artificial that it should not only be disregarded but even considered harmful.²² A firm and well-founded chronological order for this type of constructions can hardly be worked out before their finds have been doubled. Besides, we need more precise archaeological observations during their investigation. At present only an attempt could be made to relate the newly found tombs to the ones already known of the same type on the basis of their formal characteristics and to define their function more clearly by examining the evidence for tomb-mausoleums in Thrace.

On the basis of their plans the Ravnogor tombs can be assigned to the group of domed chamber tombs with a long dromos. They differ in the technique of construction, but it must be realized that both were executed in a primitive way. Tomb no. 1 is closely paralleled only by the tomb near the village of Lyaskovo (situated about 20 km South-East of the village on the opposite slope).²³ Tomb no. 2 has no such direct analogy.

As noted before, the dimensions of the inner sides of the chamber tombs of Ravnogor are the largest of all domed ones in Bulgaria; they are only surpassed in size by the domed tomb near Lozensgrad in Turkey, which has a diameter of 6.8 m.²⁴ The other domed tombs in Bulgaria are of substantially smaller proportions, measuring up to 4.65 m (Belovo) or 4.60 m (Strelcha) in diameter. Considering the fact that in the two last

stones and comprises a small elliptical chamber with dome, a corridor and a primitively formed facade. The finds indicate that its construction dates to the end of the 4th or to the 3rd century BC, see Г. Китов, Куполните гробници на нос Калиакра и нос Чиракман край Каварна, *Terra Antiqua Balcanica* 4 (Sofia 1990); I have not included here all constructions. Most of the tombs listed have already received archaeological treatment elsewhere.

²⁰ A.M. Mansel, *Thrakya Kurklareli Kubeli Mazarları* (Ankara 1943).

²¹ Ал. Фол, *Политическа история на траките* (София 1972) 64; Китов (*supra* note 8) 16, fig. 11.

²² Mikov (*supra* note 19).

²³ Velkov (*supra* note 6).

²⁴ Mansel (*supra* note 20).

mentioned examples quadrae, iron cramps and lead were used, we have to emphasize the outstanding achievement of the builders of the Ravnogor tombs.

The main question raised by the newly found tombs is that of their function. In my opinion, there is sufficient ground to identify them as mausoleums. Comparison to other, similar monuments strengthens the case for the existence of a group of domed tombs in Thrace designed to function as tomb-mausoleum and actually used as such for a long time.

There was found a considerable amount of ceramic fragments showing characteristic traits of the pottery over a period of three centuries, from the late 4th century BC to the beginning of the 1st century AD. These could only give an approximate date to the construction of the tombs, but were more exact as far as the time of use of the monuments is concerned. That the buildings were carefully preserved under a mound of earth can only be meaningfully explained in the light of their function as mausoleum or, if the term might be considered more appropriate, sanctuary.

To the large chambers at Ravnogor belong correspondingly long corridors. With the exception of the dromos of the tomb in Mezek, the length of which is unique (20.65 m),²⁵ the corridors at Ravnogor are about two times longer than those of other tombs. They are structurally connected with the chambers, which would not have been necessary if they did not lead from the periphery of the mound to the chamber in order to give access to the latter. At the same time, the dromoi are the outcome of a long tradition and demonstrate the aspiration to impress visitors of the circular monument. For these reasons, the entrances to the corridor were left uncovered for a long period and a door was placed between the dromos and the chamber. The presence of doors has been documented for five Thracian domed tombs. These were either in one piece or composed of two parts, and made of wood, metal or stone. The tomb at Strelcha, which undoubtedly functioned as a mausoleum, had a door in one piece which gave entrance to the circular chamber and a metal gate composed of two parts in front of the entire construction. The thresholds were worn off and the metal door had left deep traces from frequently being opened and closed.²⁶ The entrance to the circular chamber at Mezek had bronze hooks for the axis of the metal door that had once been discovered by B. Filov, but unfortunately were subsequently lost.²⁷ The tomb near Parvenetz in Markovo had representative stone gates with

²⁵ Filov (*supra* note 19) 10.

²⁶ Kitov (*supra* note 8) 18.

²⁷ Filov (*supra* note 19) 21.

spinning axis. Similarly to the decorations on the amphora-rhyton of the Panagjuriste treasure²⁸ and on stone fragments from Strelcha,²⁹ it was embellished with bosses, imitating metal nails³⁰ comparable to the ones found in the fireplace of tomb no. 1 at Ravnogor. There are some indications that in Kazanlak tomb doors were available as well. The alternative option that doors served the purpose of secondary burials of other members of the same family or dynasty, can only be partly accepted. It cannot explain, namely, the worn off state of the thresholds and the deep traces in them of the doors because of frequent opening and closing. Evidently, the doors must have given access to the chambers only in times of worship or when some other rituals had to be performed in honour of the deceased, but meanwhile deified, Thracian rulers or local chieftans. On the other hand, there can be evidence that at a certain period the entrance to the burial chamber in particular, or to the whole complex more in general, was permanently closed down. But, so far known, this happened only after the use of the tomb as a mausoleum or sanctuary for some time. At a certain moment, for example, the two entrances of the Strelcha tomb were reconstructed in such a way that their doors were replaced by stone slabs embedded in especially designed receptacles. Moreover, in front of the, formerly open, facade a four-wheeled chariot was placed with three horses in their trappings and nine large vessels. All this was subsequently buried under a combination of stone blocks, boulders and soil. Thus, the tomb-mausoleum was turned from an open monument into a closed burial.³¹ The corridor entrance of the Mezek tomb was shut by several slabs, which were structurally linked to the side stone blocks in such a manner that their removal would have caused the destruction of the chamber walls at this point. The floor of the dromos was covered by horse skeletons, the presence of which prevented its regular use as an entrance route.³² As frequent visits to the tomb are ascertained for an earlier period, it seems evident that permanent closing of the monument was considered necessary at some point in time.

²⁸ Г. Китов, *Панагюрско то съкровище отблизо* (in press). The scene with the bald man and the door has been interpreted in the following way: a double-door of a tomb is represented, decorated with round-headed nails. The small man opens the door and tries to go out of the tomb, the inside of which had frightened and embarrassed the first invader.

²⁹ Китов (*supra* note 8) 15.

³⁰ According to the information of Mr. Chaparov, the stone doors were covered with blotches in round relief.

³¹ Г. Китов, *Тракийските могили край Стрелча* (София 1979) 6.

Tomb no. 1 at Ravnogor was disclosed by robbers, who apparently had no difficulties to penetrate it. The corridor of tomb no. 2, on the other hand, was permanently closed and covered up at the time of looting. Similar situations elsewhere can be cited. The latter observation is very important, as it precludes the possibility that for some reason (an imminent danger or a sudden change in the cult of the dead) all Thracian mausoleums were closed at approximately one and the same time. Therefore, the reasons for closing a monument may vary from case to case, and the phenomenon itself still cannot be explained in a satisfactory way.

The phenomenon of "closed down tomb-mausoleum" may perhaps be connected with the rite of "sealing sacred places". In 1984, twenty-seven ritual pits were found in the filling of a tumulus of average dimensions near Doirentzi in the Lovech district. Their contents could be dated to the period from the Late Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. This means that in the course of more than ten centuries pits had been dug in one and the same place, in which, according to some unknown customs, parts of animals, clay vessels (broken or intact), and human remains were placed. The use of this sacred place became obsolete when a magnificent Late Hellenistic burial, covered by a tumulus, was erected there. Similar situations are known, the last one discovered concerning a tumulus near the village of Ravniste near the town of Pravets, which was explored in the year 1987.³³ On the basis of such parallels it can almost be stated in definite terms that a considerable number of Thracian tombs were used as mausoleums and sacred places of worship (heroons?) over a long period of time. Then, at a certain time and for some reasons, they were closed and abandoned, but not desecrated.

It is also relevant to the question of the function of the tombs that they were provided with outer faces, which means that they were designed as monuments with an outside as well as inside look. This surely holds good for tomb no. 1 at Ravnogor, whereas the outer face of tomb no. 2 can be explained as resulting from a tradition of which the roots have to be searched for. Of the remaining Thracian domed tombs, those at Belovo, Lozengrad B and Parvenetz certainly had outer faces. Others were covered up by a tumulus in the course of their construction and therefore lacked outer faces (Kazanlak, Lozengrad A, Koprinka, Yankovo, Kavarna,

³² Filov (*supra* note 19) 4.

³³ Excavations lead by G. Kitov and P. Pavlov, partly published in: Г. Китов, Тракийски могили от III-I в. пр.н.е. край с. Дойреници, Ловешки окръг, II международен конгрес по българистика, Доклади 6 (София 1987) 38. Г. Китов, Т. Борисова, Обхождания и разкопки на тракийски могили в община Правец, АОР (Благоевград 1988) 63.

and Strelcha).³⁴ For the tombs near Lyaskovo, Rozovetz, and Dolno Levski the relevant data are missing, whereas at Mezek and Vulchepol there still exists the possibility to check what the situation is. Regardless the question of outer faces, it can positively be stated that facades are a feature of Thracian tombs. The phenomenon is clearly reported for the domed tombs at Strelcha,³⁵ but only hinted at in the case of the tombs near Lozengrad (A & B), Vulchepol, Mezek, Parvenetz, Kavarna, Ravnogor (no. 1), and, perhaps, the two tombs at Yankovo. The construction of a facade is meaningful only in case of an open-air monument. If such a monument is used as a tomb, it can only be defined as a mausoleum. The facts and considerations presented here are based on the plans and constructions of the domed tombs discussed. If the arguments be considered well-founded, it will not be difficult to prove that the mere idea of tomb-mausoleums generated these plans and constructions. Moreover, the given archaeological views can be supported by information from the written sources.³⁶

The newly discovered tombs at Ravnogor do not, of course, help us to solve all problems connected with Thracian funerary architecture. Sometimes they force us to question again matters which already for a long time have been considered as settled.

On the other hand, they present new data which require investigation or they show that features which formerly were considered unique, are not.

The Ravnogor tombs do present helpful additional evidence relating to the problem of the origin of the domed tombs. Because of their unusual findspot, we may reasonably expect to discover new monuments of similar type in comparably outlying regions of our country. The correspondence of the results from earlier investigations to the newly gained information safeguards the reliability of new conclusions. It is well-known that the first explorer of domed tombs in Thrace propagated the idea of their Mycenaean origin and cherished the hope that monuments of the type stemming from the, up till then, dark period between the end of the Bronze Age and the second half of the 1st millennium BC, would once turn up and provide the missing link. His opponents, on the other hand, used the fact that documentary evidence of domed tombs during the intermediate period is entirely lacking as their chief argument to

³⁴ See note 7 above.

³⁵ Kitov (*supra* note 31) 8 for the facades of the two Strelcha tombs, their importance and parallels.

³⁶ Herodotos IV, 95; Euripides, *Rhesos* 967.

reject this thesis.³⁷ In fact, however, the discovery of a domed construction near the village of Garlo in the district of Pernik,³⁸ and the investigation of newly found rock tombs in various regions of Thrace,³⁹ inaugurated a steady process of filling in the blank spots in our knowledge—a process which has all chances of successful completion through future archaeological exploration of especially the Rhodopes district. The two domed tombs, the sacred gifts and other finds from the tumuli, certainly stimulate reconsideration of the position of this mountainous region in the course of Thracian history and the development of Thracian culture—and this not only from a regional point of view.

³⁷ Apart from the literature already cited, a large number of studies exists on the origin of the Thracian domed tombs. It is impossible to include them all here.

³⁸ Д. Джонова, *Мегалитен храм-кладенец при с. Гърло, Пернишки окръг* (София 1984).

³⁹ *Тракийски паметници 1. Мегалитите в Тракия* (София 1976) 82 и сл. Г. Китов, П. Теодосиев, П. Павлов, *Тракийските надгробни могили в селищна система Ловеч, АОР* (Михайловград 1982) 31. P. Delev, "Two Tholos Tombs at Malko Tırnovu," *Thracia Pontica* 2 (Sofia 1985).



Fig. 1. The locality of "Chemerika" where the necropole with its tumuli is situated.



Fig. 2. Silver gilded applique from tumulus II—bust of Athens, 2nd century AD.



Fig. 3. Silver gilded applique from tumulus II—bust of Nike, 2nd century AD.



Fig. 4. Golden medallion depicting the image of two winged sphinxes with one common head, 6th century BC.

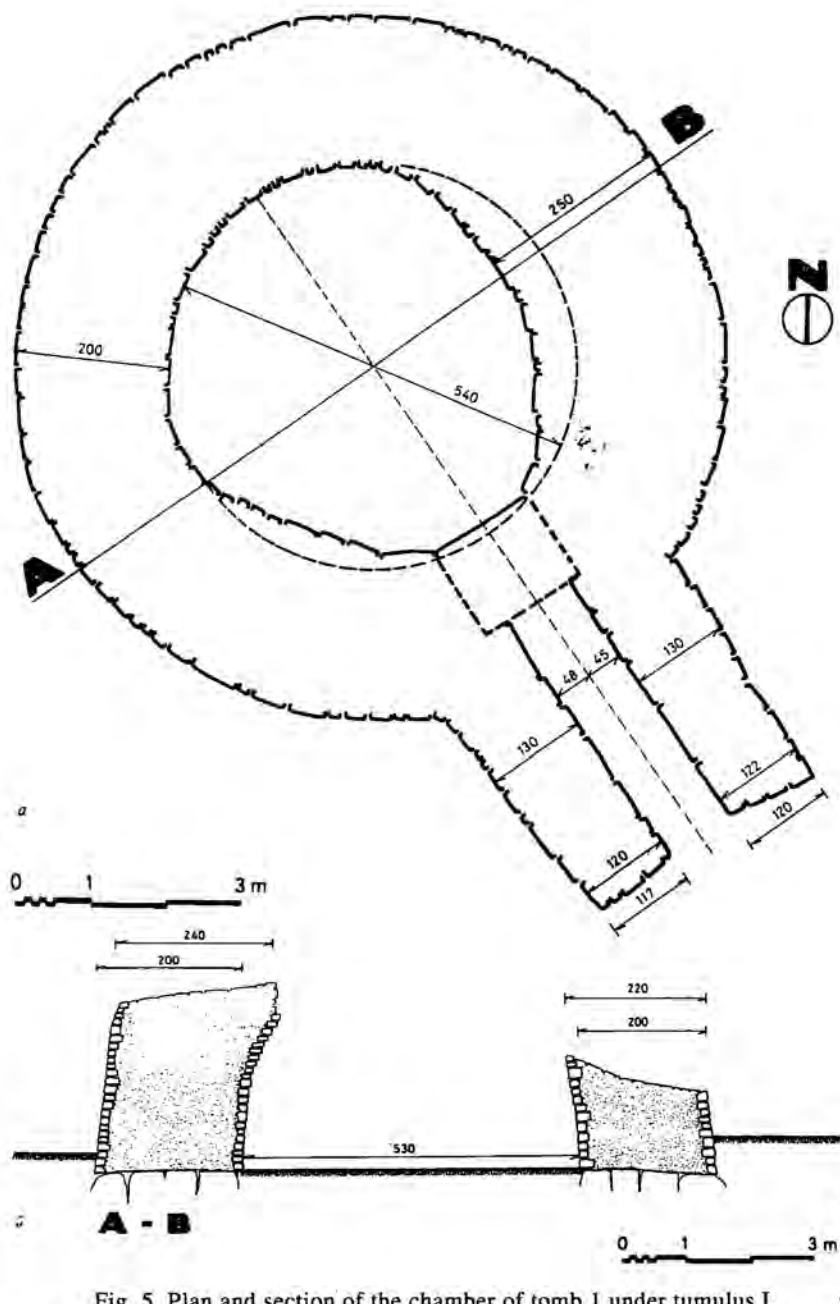


Fig. 5. Plan and section of the chamber of tomb I under tumulus I.



Fig. 6. The outer angle of the chamber and the corridor, testifying the simultaneous building of both these parts.



Fig. 7. View of the outer face of tomb 1.



Fig. 8. Entrance of tomb 1.



Fig. 9. Overall view of tomb 1 from the south.



Fig. 10. Face and corridor of tomb 1.

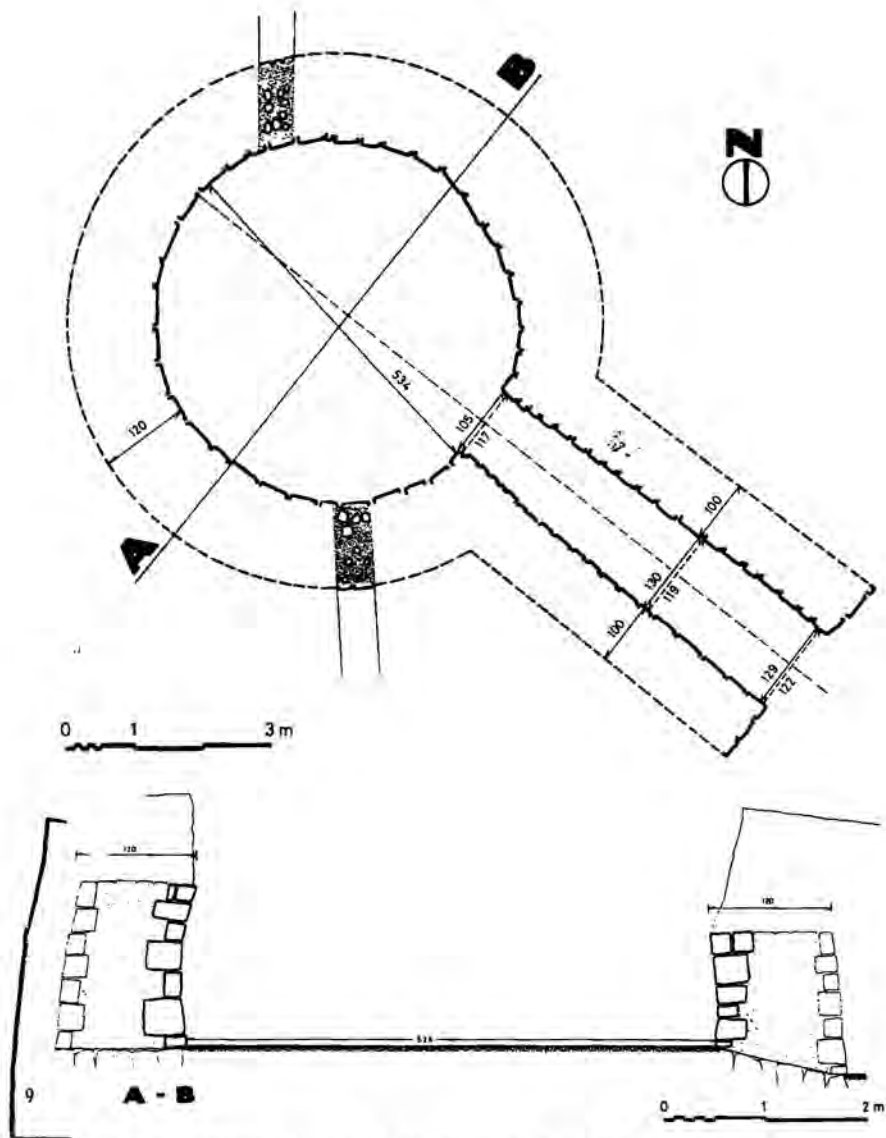


Fig. 11. Plan and section of the chamber of tomb 2 under tumulus IX.



Fig. 12. Entrance of tomb 2 from the southeast.

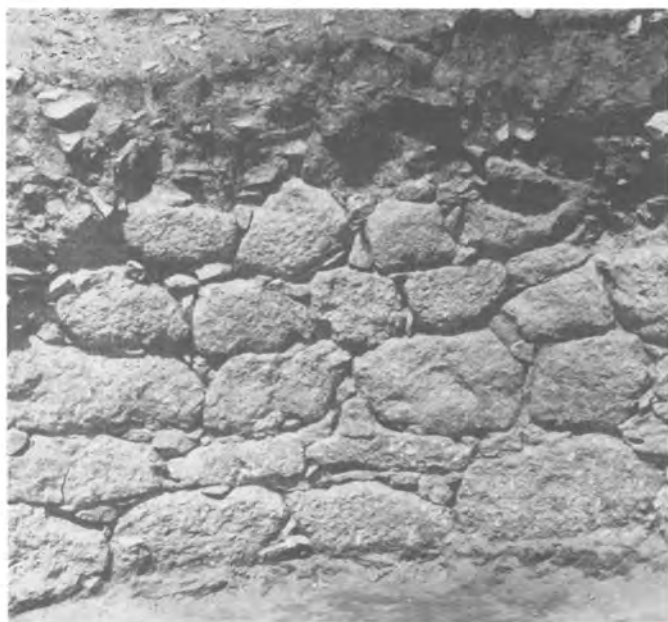


Fig. 13. Inner wall of the chamber of tomb 2.



Fig. 14. Stones which originally locked the corridor of tomb 2.



Fig. 15. Part of the facade of the tomb-mausoleum near Strelcha, showing the entrance, ornamentation and covering slabs.