

A 4TH CENTURY BC THRACIAN ROYAL TOMB FROM THE KAZANLUK REGION, SOUTHERN BULGARIA*

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The Kazanluk Plain is localized between the Balkan Range and the Sredna Gora Mountain, almost at the very heart of Bulgaria. Its natural characteristics and its geographic position have predetermined its exceptional significance for the history of Bulgaria and the Balkan Peninsula.

A tell which was inhabited between the Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age has been explored in Kazanluk.¹ Other tells are also known from the region near the villages of Gorno Sahrane, Viden, Pavel Banya, Koprinka, Rozovo, Srednogorovo, Krun, Dolno Izvorovo and Sheynovo.² The Thracian city of Seuthopolis was built in the southern part of the valley and existed in the 4th-3rd centuries BC,³ while the Kazanluk tomb from the same period is among the most impressive monuments of *tholos* architecture, with the best painted decoration outside Greece and Italy.⁴ Hundreds of Thracian tumuli were piled up in the Kazanluk region,⁵ the densest clustering being in the area of the villages of Shipka, Sheynovo, Yasenovo, Krun and Hadji Dimiter, where they number more than 200. Moreover, among them there are also three colossal embankments (Golyamata Kosmatka, Shishmanets and Ostrousha), which are among the largest in Bulgaria: more than 20 m in height and about 100 m in diameter. Among the remaining tumuli there are many large and small ones. There is also a considerable number of medium-sized, small and very small tumuli, among which also tumuli that are barely perceptible, and some of them have not even been registered.⁶ Two tumular

* [Editing of the English version FCW.]

¹ Georgiev 1974: 4 ff.; Georgiev 1972: 81 ff.

² Тодорова 1986: 45, 55, 277 and references.

³ Димитров 1984: 11 (with references); Чичикова 1991: 60 and bibliography; Николов 1991: 71 ff. (and references).

⁴ Огненова-Маринова 1991: 12 and references; Василева 1991a: 26 ff.; Василева 1991b: 36 ff.

⁵ For reports about tumuli in the district of Kazanluk see: Табакова-Цанова 1991: 104 ff.; Домаралски 1991: 126 ff. and references.

embankments—a medium-sized one (Galkina Mogila) and a large one (Pudarskata Mogila)—attracted treasure-hunters, which prompted our interference.

The excavations were conducted on the above-mentioned two tumular embankments and on several other small embankments bearing traces of the digging of treasure-hunters or, due to their small size, being almost obliterated by regular agricultural cultivation of the land. Our surprise was hence so much the greater when we discovered unique constructions and materials in them, which only hint at the potential significance of the remaining larger tumular embankments and leave grounds for hypotheses about the largest mounds. The excavations in the region of the necropolis were concentrated between the villages of Shipka and Sheynovo, they lasted about six weeks and resulted in the thorough investigation of 15 tumular embankments (see Fig. 1).⁷ The exploration of several other tumuli near Krun has only started. The materials and tombs discovered are assignable to the Thracian culture and cover a considerable period of time ranging from the Late Bronze Age to the Late Roman period. However, the majority of the tombs are dated to the 5th-3rd centuries BC. As a consequence, part of the tumuli may safely be considered to belong to the northern necropolis of the Thracian city of Seuthopolis, the capital of the state at the time of Seuthes III who reigned in the last three decades of the 4th and the first years of the 3rd century BC. The enormous number of tumuli and the fact that some of them transcended the chronological limits of the city presuppose the existence of another or other centres of Thracian political life of an earlier and/or later date, that are yet to be discovered and investigated. From several tumuli came no archaeological finds, in some cases because there was no construction below the embankment, in others because they had been destroyed by treasure-hunters and agricultural activities. Some other tumuli contained tombs, but no burials were performed in them or in the mound itself—these only add up to the number of known monuments and increase our knowledge of burial practices in general.⁸ Five tumuli, however, produced unique or unfamiliar finds as to shape, content and burial customs; some of these finds might even not be linked to the burials at all.

⁶ Observations of the team led by us—Summer of 1992.

⁷ The excavations took place under supervision of the authors from 23.07 to 31.08.1992 and were supported by the History Museum at Kazanluk which received all the finds. Financial aid was further received from "Orbita Tours" Ltd., Fondation "St. st. Cyril and Methodij", "Photon"—Kazanluk, and others.

⁸ For Thracian tumuli in Bulgaria and the method of piling the mound, see Kitov 1987a: 5 ff. and Kitov (forthc.).



Fig. 1. The tumulus Ostrousha in the area of the town of Shipka
[photo: Georgi Kitov].



Fig. 2. Incised floral ornamentation on the walls of the silver mouth of a wine-skin; second half of the 5th century BC [photo: Mario Filipov].

The mound known as Konsulova Mogila,⁹ which had actually already ceased to exist as a mound, originally concealed a small and primitive looking accumulation of stones. After its destruction by ploughing, the stones were scattered, together with an iron spearhead, a bronze vase in *aryballos*-like shape and a silver mouth. The shape of the bronze vase is paralleled for only seven other finds in Bulgaria,¹⁰ but it is well-known in Scythia, for which reason this type of vase has been considered a typical feature of Scythian culture. After the discovery in 1992 of this vessel of the Konsulova Mogila, and another one which came to light during our excavation of the Daykina tumulus near the town of Loukovit in Northern Bulgaria, however, it is possible to revive the view of Mantsevich, rejected in the Soviet Ukrainian and Russian literature, that this type of vessel is of Thracio-Macedonian origin.¹¹ The silver mouth (see Fig. 2) is richly decorated with floral designs and in addition to this contains five incised Greek letters, which probably bear reference to the capacity of the missing vessel to which the mouth once belonged. The angle of the walls towards the base and the remnants of silver rivets give us reason to identify the mouth in question as that of a wine-skin—a typical attribute of the Thracian way of life in which, according to the testimony of literary sources, feasts with excessive wine drinking took a prominent place. Konsulova Mogila can be dated provisionally to the late 5th or first half of the 4th century BC, so that it does not seem to be connected with Seuthopolis.

Two adjacent tumuli, the Tanina Mogila¹² and the Montina Mogila,¹³ contained identical stone accumulations forming small burial mounds. While the first one turned out to be empty and even did not show any traces of burial practices, the second had three primitively outlined sections beneath the heap of stones: one small section in the middle and two larger ones positioned symmetrically on either side along the east-west axis. One of these sections showed traces of fire on its floor, possibly resulting from rituals connected with the worship of solar

⁹Named after our collaborator from the village of Sheynovo, Furco Consulov, who showed us the location of the already destroyed tumulus. The metal objects were discovered with the help of American ("Fischer") and Bulgarian ("Ergin") metal detectors.

¹⁰Two from Duvanlii, district of Plovdiv, and one from Svetlen, district of Popovo (Филлов 1934: 223 with literature), one from Debnevo, district of Trojan, and two from Toros, district of Lukovit (Kitov & Pavlov 1987: 17 ff.).

¹¹Манцевич 1987: nos. 64-66, who gives numerous references to parallels from the former Soviet Union and Bulgaria. Mantsevich adds to this type of vessels also a silver vessel from Raduveng, district of Lovech (see Филлов 1916-8: 34), which in our opinion does not belong to this group.

¹²Named after a member of our expedition, Tania Borisova.

¹³Named after a member of our expedition, Simona Peeva.

(fiery) deities; the other section in that case must have been reserved for chthonic cults.¹⁴ At any rate, cult objects, weapons, articles of adornment and vessels were found in both locations. In combination with some findings from other tumuli, the piling of the tumular embankment, the shaping of the sections and the objects found in them testify to the lasting presence of Orphic traditions in Thracian religious life, which until recently had received no satisfactory explanation.¹⁵

The importance of these Orphic traditions is further underlined by the finds from Binyova Mogila.¹⁶ No human burials were registered here, only two equine skeletons, one of which completely preserved and at a higher level than the other. Below the level of this first equine skeleton, but still above that of the surrounding terrain, there was an E-shaped stone construction. The second horse, which had been decapitated before its burial, was found below the long wall of the latter structure. An iron bridle and a full set of accessories to it was placed behind the centre of the horse's spinal cord. Nine silver appliquéés which decorated the leather straps to the horse's head are of exceptional scientific and artistic value. One of these appliquéés was used as a head-piece, the rest were placed symmetrically on either side of the horse's head, concealing the places where the leather straps were tied together or crossed (cheek-pieces). A three-dimensional ram's head is mounted in the centre of the head-piece. This animal appears for the first time on a Thracian head-piece. The central plaque is decorated with incised floral ornamentation. Two of the cheek-pieces are symmetrical long plaques, decorated with the "interlinked lion's paw" motif and a stylized animal head. The remaining four cheek-pieces are two mirror pairs of oval open-work plaques—*triskeles*—decorated with three griffin heads spirally twisted around the centre (see Fig. 3). In general, this type of horse-trapping has no direct parallels in Thrace, although it is possible to perceive a certain similarity with finds from the Mogilanska Mogila tumulus in Vratsa,¹⁷ the village of Bednyakovo (present-day Stoyan Zaimovo) near Chirpan,¹⁸ and elsewhere.¹⁹ The workmanship of the decoration is exquisite and in the schematic style typical of Thracian art during the second half of the

¹⁴ Фол 1990.

¹⁵ Фол 1986.

¹⁶ Named after Dobrin Mutafov-Binyo from Shipka.

¹⁷ Venedikov 1975: 18 ff.

¹⁸ Филлов 1916-8: 30 ff.

¹⁹ Similarities in style, subject and structure are traceable for the appliquéés from Lukovit (most recently Kitov 1987b: 27 ff. with a survey of research on the unpublished treasure) and from the middle tumulus near Mezek (Велков 1934: 134 ff.). See Venedikov & Gerassimov 1973: nos. 257 ff. for a collection of similar Thracian objects as known up to 1970.

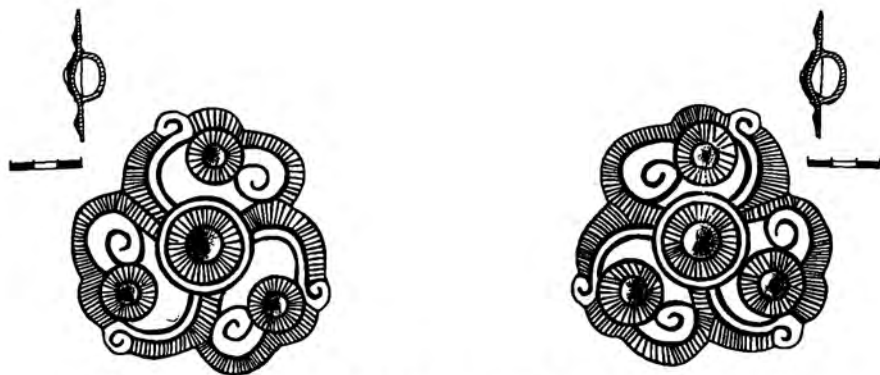


Fig. 3. Silver cheek-pieces for horse-trappings with stylized griffin heads; second half of the 4th century BC [drawing: Veska Maradjieva].



Fig. 4. Clay jug inside a larger vessel from one of the graves in Tonkova Mogila; 3rd century BC [photo: Georgi Kitov].

4th century BC.²⁰ All outlines have been obtained by the use of low relief in combination with engraved lines. These lines are light, precise and confident, betraying the hand of an artist who had a detailed knowledge of the animal body and mastered to perfection the technical and artistic skills in toreutics required for the production of this advanced form of Thracian art. The unique character of these appliquéés, and their association with the two equine skeletons instead of human burials, qualify Binyova Mogila as an intriguing complex for which a satisfactory explanation is yet to be found.

The finds from the barely visible Tonkova Mogila turned out to be even more surprising.²¹ Here, on a platform in the old terrain, six human skeletons were discovered in two rows and one equine skeleton to the south of these. The burial on the extreme left side (= in the northwest) was that of a man, next to this there was a female burial, followed by that of four adolescents and children. Judging from the traces, two of the skeletons were clearly burned on the spot. The man and the boys were associated with pieces of armament placed next to them, whereas the woman had articles of adornment. There were some clay vessels next to each of the skeletons (see Fig. 4). There are several surprising aspects about these finds. First, the discovery of the burial of a whole family is something special. It could be explained in terms of an epidemic outburst, a natural disaster (but this seems unlikely as no irregularities in the position of the skeletons have been observed), war casualties or human sacrifices—in connection with the latter suggestion one could think of the custom to send messengers to Zalmoxis.²² It is also interesting to note the combination of inhumation with cremation in the same graves. As a rule, it is believed that cremation was a more expensive and prestigious ritual than inhumation.²³

Finally, the findings from Malkata Mogila²⁴ are downright sensational. As the name of the tumulus suggests, the embankment is among the smaller ones, being only 4 m in height, and therefore a significant discovery was least expected. Yet below the remains of this tumulus there happened to be an un plundered Thracian royal tomb.

The sepulchral construction had been anticipated because preliminary geophysical measurements indicated the existence of a long stone construction in the southern part of the tumulus.²⁵ The tomb was

²⁰ Kitov 1980: 167 ff. and references.

²¹ Named after the geophysicist Nikola Tonkov (see also note 25 below).

²² Herod. IV, 94.

²³ Kitov 1987a with quoted examples and bibliographical references; Миков 1931-2: 136 ff. tries to differentiate the ritual according to sex.

²⁴ Name of the tumulus popular among the local population.

²⁵ Measurements by Il. Katevsky and N. Tonkov of the Laboratory of Geophysics at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

discovered two hours after the excavations had started. Two days later, the exploration of the tomb was completed and Thracian archaeology had been enriched with yet another unique burial complex.

The complex comprised a monumental built grave, resembling a sarcophagus, and a primitive stone tomb (see Figs. 5-6). The grave first mentioned was shaped by nine enormous stone slabs.²⁶ The two slabs for the roof were supported in the east by small stones, forming a narrow opening with the lateral walls, part of the roof protruding above and before it. The interior of the grave was filled with different layers of alternatively soft and compact soil, mixed with gravel. The well-ordered nature of the layers suggests that the tomb had been filled deliberately. No actual burial was traced in the chamber thus formed. In our opinion, it must be identified as a symbolic burial or cenotaph, built in honour of an eminent deceased person.

The earlier tomb was primitively built of river boulders and consisted of a rectangular chamber with a short corridor to the southeast.²⁷ The poor quality of the building material and the fact that no mortar was used indicates that the tumular embankment must have been piled up simultaneously in order to strengthen the construction.²⁸ Similarly, the burial it contained must have been performed before the walls of the chamber had been finished and covered by earth. Thus it is clear that first the larger objects among the inventory of the tomb had been carefully protected by small pebbles, next the walls had been completed and finally the whole construction had been piled over simultaneously from both the outside and the inside. No roof structure was needed and hence it was not built. The tomb remained inaccessible and hence it had not been used as a sanctuary.²⁹

The corpse had been placed in the chamber in such a manner that it lay along its diagonal with the head to the south. It was buried with a number of personal belongings consisting of vessels of clay, silver and bronze, and some bone objects and other things, placed on either side. The personal objects qualify the deceased male as a very rich and high-ranking member of Thracian aristocracy. Some of the objects even allow his identification as a priest-king, typical of Thracian society at the time.³⁰ The grave goods suggest that the priest-king died in the second half of the 4th century BC.

²⁶ The floor is made of 3 large slabs which support the lateral ones.

²⁷ Kitov 1979a: 6. Nine large clay vessels were found—upside down and with holes in the bottom made on the spot with a sharp instrument—just outside the tumulus near Strelcha; for the ritual significance of this find, see Kitov 1977: 18.

²⁸ The orientation of the chamber is SE to NW.

²⁹ For examples of tombs used as a sanctuary, see Kitov 1990-1: 26 ff.

³⁰ Cf. note 29 above.

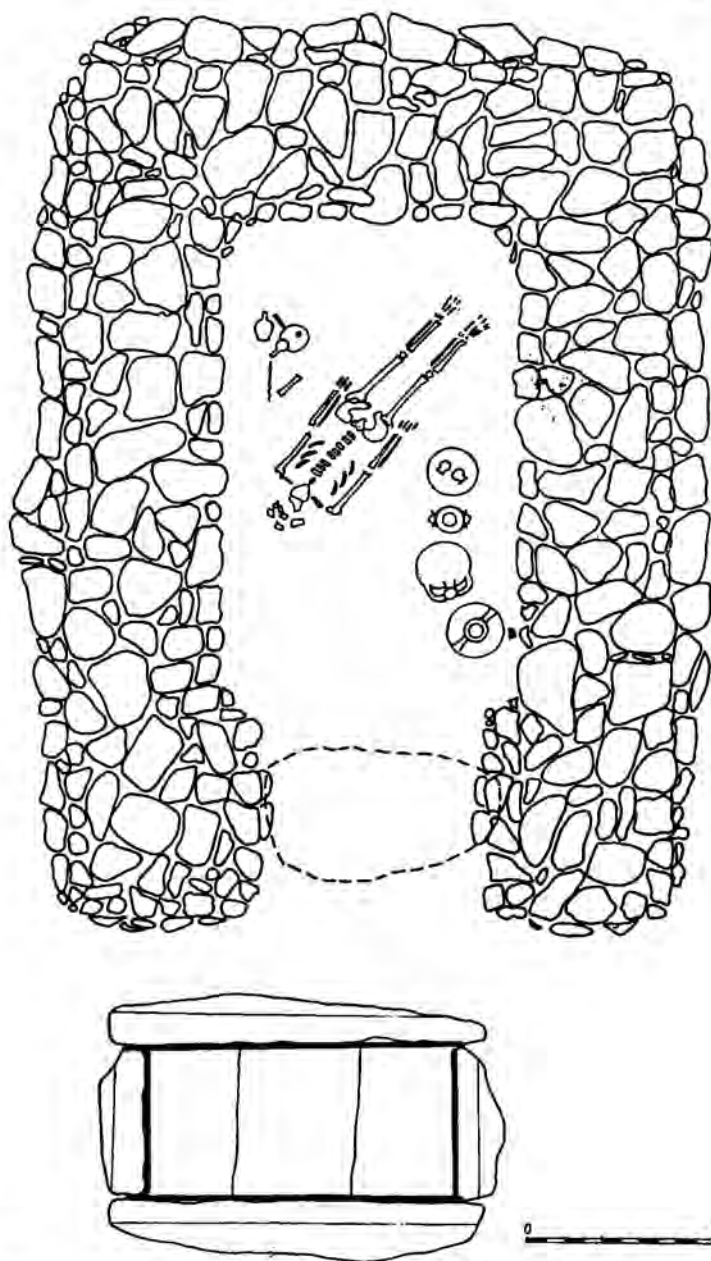
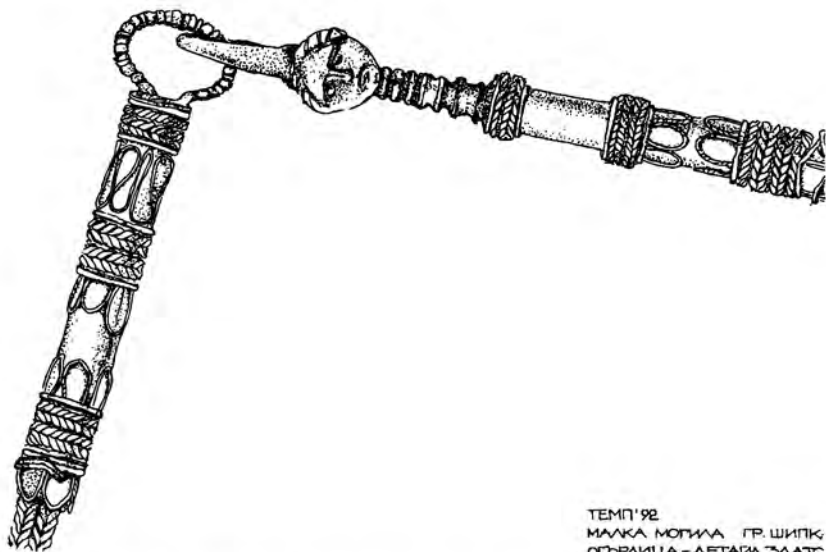


Fig. 5. The royal tomb and the cenotaph in front of it; second half of the 4th century BC [plan: Eli Tsenova].



Fig. 6. The cenotaph in front of the royal tomb of Malkata Mogila; second half of the 4th century BC [photo: Georgi Kitov].



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Fig. 7. The clasps of the large gold necklace from the royal tomb of Malkata Mogila; second half of the 4th century BC [drawing: Veneta Ivanova].

From a scientific viewpoint, the two bone objects are the most interesting finds in the tomb. These are shaped like a labrys, a symbol of power in both Mycenaean and ancient Thracian culture.³¹ One of them had a handle of some undurable material which had been coated with silver sheet. The other one must also have had some sort of facility for suspension as it appeared to have hung around the person's neck or to have been attached to his clothes.

The mirror and a hollow clay spheric pellet, found near the bone sceptres, are of special importance to the researchers of Thracian religion. Several sources are known, according to which the presence of the cited objects is associated with the rites dedicated to Dionysos-Zagreus.³² There are similar finds from the Mogilanska Mogila tumulus in Vratsa, the tumuli near Duvanlii and many other Thracian burials.

A massive gold ring was found in association with the sceptres. Its ellipsoid plaque is decorated with the incised image of two human figures facing each other. Careful analysis of these figures points out that the scene is about royal investiture: a Thracian goddess hands the power insignia to a ruler. Moreover, one of these power insignia, the long-handled sceptre, seems to end like a labrys and resembles the bone *labrys* with its formerly silver-plated handle. The scene of the gold ring has no direct analogies in Thrace. In the light of these finds, however, there can be no doubt that we are dealing here with the burial of a priest-king. The deceased wore a magnificent gold necklace, with exquisite and richly decorated clasps and pendants (see Figs. 7-8). This piece of jewelry has parallels in Duvanlii³³ and later finds elsewhere.³⁴ For a comparable object in silver one could point to the magnificent necklace from Boukyovtsi.³⁵ The technique of making necklaces from thousands of miniature rings soldered on the inside is attested for Bulgaria from the Late Bronze Age onward. It is therefore all the more surprising that at the beginning of this century modern jewelry has rediscovered this technique and patented it in Italy. The clasp and the pendants are not only masterly executed but also decorated with rosettes, palmettes and other ornaments in filigree and granulation.³⁶ Only under a magnifying glass

³¹ Фол 1972: 51 ff.; Kitov 1979b: 13 ff. (with references). A similar rite is depicted on the gold ring from Brezovo (Филов 1916-8: 3) and in the unfinished central scene of the chamber of the Sveshtary tomb (Чичикова 1983: 4, 20 ff.).

³² Clem. Alex. Protrept. II 17, 2-18; Pap. Gurub I 29. For a commentary, see Фол 1991: 115.

³³ Филов 1934: 84.

³⁴ Kitov & Pavlov 1987: 33, no. 127.

³⁵ Попов 1922-5: 1 ff.

³⁶ Филов 1937: 75.

one is able to discern the exact clustering of the miniature gold pearls in grape- or pyramid-like shapes. Three ellipsoid plaques are decorated on the top with embossed miniature images of Medusa, but the artist did not succeed in depicting the snakes in her hair for lack of space and due to technical restrictions. The necklace from Malkata Mogila is the best example of Hellenistic toreutics found thus far in Bulgaria. However, it is not the only find. Several dozen of other objects were scattered over and around the skull and chest area. Most numerous among these finds were beads of different types belonging to two or more gold necklaces. Some of these beads are undecorated, others covered with rosettes and other motifs in filigree and granulation.³⁷ Being rather coarse in execution, they illustrate the aspirations for luxury and splendour among some aristocratic circles, which has found quantitative rather than qualitative expression. As opposed to this, among the beads there was also a large biconic pendant of excellent workmanship and artistic merit, not inferior in any way to that of the large gold necklace. The carefully arranged conic bulges are framed and interlinked by numerous elegantly twisted thin gold wires. All remaining gold objects are undecorated: these add to the richness of the burial, but have no special artistic merit.

Numerous silver ornaments were also found on the chest of the deceased person, notably three silver necklaces made in a similar way as the large gold one, but with different types of fibulae to attach them to the clothes.

Among the three clay vessels there is one well preserved askos of fine clay and with a smooth red surface—a rare find. All the clay vessels were, just like their metal counterparts, probably produced in Thrace. Two small *phiale* were found in a large, undecorated bronze bowl (see Fig. 9). This type of vessel is a typical element of the possessions of Thracian kings.³⁸ Next to the bronze bowl with the *phiale* there was a bronze *situla*, elegantly shaped, with smooth walls and a handle at both sides bent at 180° near the end and decorated at the end with conic bulges in high profile. This *situla* is very well preserved and belongs to a type identified as Thracian by Venedikov.³⁹ The ears for the handles protrude from the appliqué soldered to the walls of the vessel (see Fig. 10). The one is decorated with the expressive head of a bearded Silenus, the other with a lion head, also rendered in a naturalistic way. Its muzzle is open and passes into a long and narrow spout out of which liquid—wine undoubtedly—flowed freely. Behind the lion head a dozen holes have been pierced in the wall of the *situla*, possibly functioning as a strainer.

³⁷ Филов 1934: 42.

³⁸ Marazov 1989: 91 ff.

³⁹ Venedikov 1977: 91 ff.

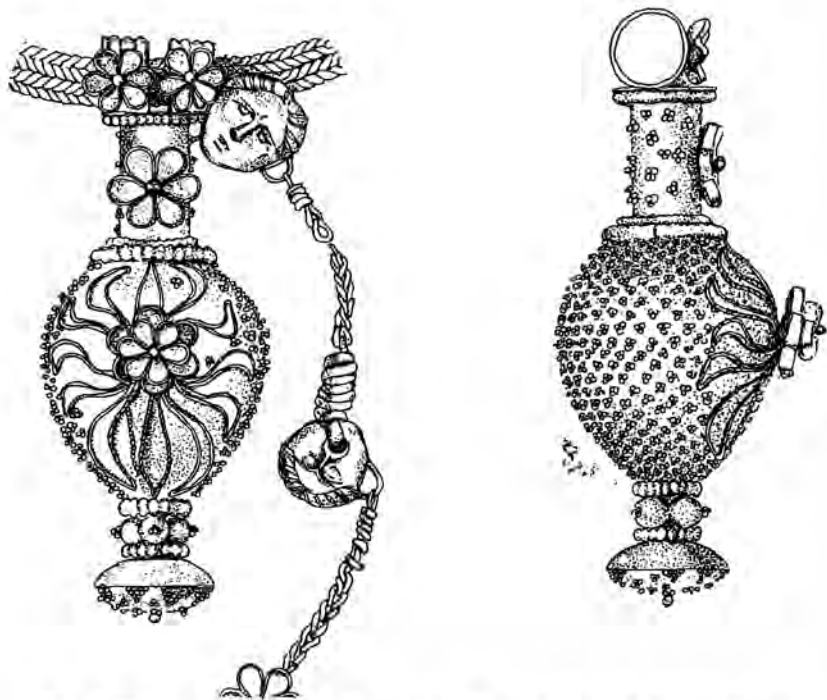


Fig. 8. The pendant of the same necklace, viewed from the front and lateral side; second half of the 4th century BC [drawing: Veneta Ivanova].

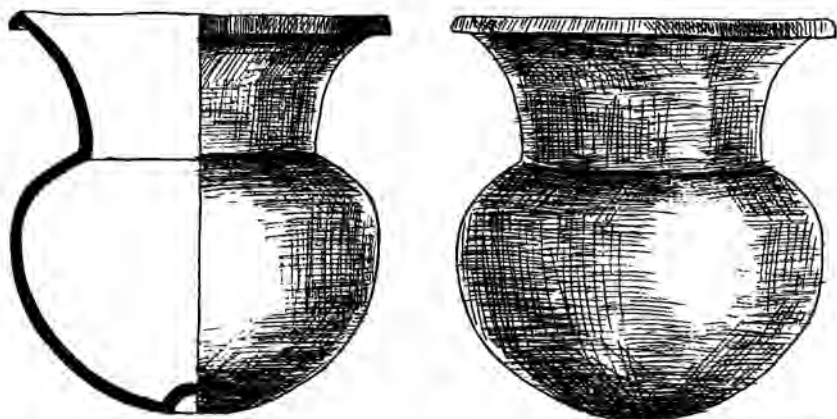


Fig. 9. Silver phiale from the royal tomb [profile and drawing: Veska Maradjieva].



Fig. 10. One of the appliquéés to the ears of the handles on the bronze *situla* from the royal tomb, decorated with the head of a bearded Silenus; second half of the 4th century BC [drawing: Veska Maradjieva].



Fig. 11. Newly-discovered mausoleum-like tomb near the town of Shipka; 4th century BC [photo: Georgi Kitov].

If we realize that in ancient Thrace the skin and seeds of the grapes were not removed from the wine, the possibility that the *situla* served as a container for wine is further underlined.⁴⁰ Of all the representatives of this type of vessel from Bulgaria,⁴¹ the *situla* from Malkata Mogila is not only the best preserved but also the most splendidly decorated one. It can best be compared to the bronze *situla* from Derveni⁴² and the silver one from the tomb of Philip of Macedon near Vergina.⁴³

Most of the objects found in Malkata Mogila are datable to the second half of the 4th century BC. Only the gold ring and some of the beads appear to be about a century older. Apparently, these were insignia of royal power handed down from generation to generation for some time. Unfortunately, it remains a mystery to us why in the second half of the 4th century this tradition was suddenly interrupted and the ring was buried with its last owner.

Announcement

When the present paper was written and submitted for publication, a unique archaeological discovery was made in the region of Shipka, consisting of the largest tomb found in Thrace thus far (see Fig. 11). This tomb was investigated in the course of rescue excavations in April 1993. It covers an area of almost 100 sq. m and has six chambers—five rectangular and one round. The central chamber is made of a large stone block of huge dimensions. Its ceiling is covered with mural paintings: floral ornamentation, animal images, portraits and entire scenes. An equine skeleton with a complete set of artistically decorated appliqué was found in one of the chambers, as well as several silver vessels and items of armament. *Amphorae*, *pythoi*, small clay vessels and architectural details are arranged in front of the tomb.

The authors will present a detailed account of their discovery in the next issue of *Talanta*.

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⁴⁰ Кацаров 1913: 37 ff.; Михайлов 1972: 123 ff.

⁴¹ Venedikov 1977: 65 ff., nos. 1-8 (with references). The best preserved example is from Zlokuchene in the district of Shumen.

⁴² Andronicos 1983: no. 43.

⁴³ Andronicos 1984. The tomb at Vergina surpasses our Malkata Mogila only in richness; it also contains yet another parallel for our necklace, see Andronicos 1984: 179. Both tombs are dated to approximately the same time.

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