

## **THE THRACIAN TOMBS - STUDY, CONDITION, PROTECTION**

RALITZA BAZAYTOVA

Sofia , Bulgaria , Center for architecture , Bulgarian Academy of Sciences ,  
Ministry of culture ,Historian of art and architecture

The paper focuses on the Thracian tombs, their architectural types and decoration. The Thracian tombs date from the V to the III c. B.C., they were excavated during the XX century and now we can try to find a new view on the studies on them, their condition and efforts for their protection. The tombs at Kazanlack and Svestary are in the Word Heritage List, but they need more care for their protection and funds, so they can be open to publick and safe in the same time.

Now, on the eve of the XXI century , there is a need to have a new view on the Thracian tombs in the present bulgarian lands. There is a need to analyze the research of them, done during the past 100 years and the development of the studies on them, according with the new finds. The Tracian tombs are an important part of the cultural and arcitectural heritage of Ancient Thracia and the Hellenistic world.

The Thracian tombs are built during the VIII century B.C. in their major part. There are numerous tombs in both of the types here - with circular and rectangular forms of their foundations. The major part of them are with circular foundations - tholoses - more than 27. After the excavations, done mostly during the XX century, there were found tombs, only with their foundations left, which round forms show that they had a dome. Also there were found several tombs with their domes steel in place - very well built and in a fine condition, which gives the possibility for research of the development of the dome here. The likeness between these tombs and the ancient tholoses in Mycenae in quite well seen, so it is possible to think that they are result of an old influence, entered Thracia during the II millennium B.C. and kept here afterwards, for the reason of the conservatism of the Thracian society (1 ). This similarity can be seen not only in some of the best examples of the Thracian tombs - such as the tombs at

Mezek and Kurt-kale (2), but also in the forms and decoration of several objects, found during the excavations in Thracia (3). A lot of the tholoses in Thracia are built from stones - near Mezek, Kurt-kale (4), Strelcha (5), the tombs, found recently near Shipka (6). There are also some tholoses, built from bricks with special shape. Such were found near the ancient city of Seuthopolis (7). Among them is the tomb in Kazanlak (figure 1), famous with its mural decoration (8), now in the World Heritage List. A special case are the tombs with a dome over a rectangular foundation - a galatian or lantern vault. Such can be seen now in the tombs at Kurt-kale (9), Strelcha (10), Philippovo (11), etc. That kind of vault has its origins in Asia Minor.



Figure 1 : The Thracian tomb at Kazanlack

A lot of the tombs in Thracia have rectangular forms of their foundations. For a part of these tombs we don't have enough information for the kind of the vault. We can suggest that they had some kind of wooden covering. Among them are the tombs at Starosel (12), Kran (13), Ruen (14), Borovo (15), etc. Another big part of tombs have a falls vault on their main chamber, antechambers and dromos. One of the earliest among them is the tomb near Tatarevo (16), from the V c. B.C. Other tombs with falls vaults are near Vetren (17), Kalojanovo (18), etc. There are also tombs with rectangular forms of the foundations, built with bricks. Their falls vaults are made from bricks with special shape - the tombs at Mugliz (19), the dromos of the tomb at Kazanlak (20), also the tomb, recently excavated under the "Sarafova mound" near Kran (21).

An important question is that about the development of the falls vault and the dome. There is a possibility that the semicylindrick vault is a result of the development of the falls vault here. The semicylindrick vault is very popular in the tombs of Ancient Macedonia. For that reason it was called "Macedonian vault" by a lot of researchers in the past. Now we know that the semicylindrick vault, also called "cradle vault" is also popular in the tombs in the present lands of Bulgaria and Romania. Tombs with such vault are situated in Varna (22), Lovetch (23) and near Shipka (24) in Bulgaria, near Kalatis and Konstanza in Romania. Among the tombs with cradle vault a special place has the tomb near Svestary (figure 2), famous with its rich decoration (25), now in the World Heritage List. Two smaller tombs with similar vaults are

found under the burial mounds N 12 and 13, parts of a similar ruined tomb - under the “Big Svestary mound”, which shows that such type of vault was popular in that part of Thracia - the lands of the Getai (26). The new finds near Shipka show big diversity of tombs in the lands of the Odrisai. Here are tombs with a falls cradle vault - in the mounds “Shushmanets” and “Slavchova” - next to a tomb with a semicylindrick vault with a key stone - in the “Sashova burial mound” (27). In a lot of articles the “Macedonian vaults” are situated not earlier than the



Figure 2 : The Thracian tomb at Svestary

IV c. B.C. (28). Now we know that they have not arrived there during the wars of Alexander the Great, because a lot of them are built in the beginning of the same century. In Thracia we can see the predecessors of the semicylindrick vault - the falls vault and the falls semicylindrick vault, so we can try to find the link between them. We can suggest that the falls vault first appeared here in the megalithic architecture - the dolmens, and after becoming very popular gave the development of the semicylindrick vault first here.

The Thracian tombs have a big architectural richness. One could see next, from the same period, in the same ancient village, in the same necropolis, tombs which are different, with different types of the chamber and covering, built from different materials. It seems that the Thracian architect was free to choose different architectural forms, with accordance with the ritual and the wills of the Thracian aristocrat, to whom belongs the tomb.

The Thracian tombs have also a lot of differences in their structure. They have different number of additional parts - antechambers, dromos. The antechambers can be several, they can be on the both sides of the dromos - inner or outer antechambers. In some of the tombs the antechamber is open in front and have columns - in the tombs near Starosel (29), Kran (30), Yankovo (31), etc., so the tombs look as a temple ad antis. A lot of tombs have a stable facade - the tombs near Philippovo (32), Strelcha (33), the tombs under the “Big arsenal mound”, “Helvetzia”, “Shushmanets” near Shipka (34), the tomb near Svestary (35), etc. The question is if that facade was visible for the

visitors of the ancient tombs. I think that the facade was seen in the time, when the tomb was covered only partially by the burial mound, with the entrance left free. In front of the facades of a lot of tombs there are side walls, becoming lower, which served to keep the ground in place. We can describe that part of the tomb - the facade and the side walls - as an open dromos or antechamber, depends from their length. That seems alike the way the tombs look now, when they are discovered, but the mound is left in its place.

An important question is that about the functions of the antechamber, especially of the outer antechamber. Following Malvina Rouseva, when there is an antechamber, you can suppose some rituals in front of it - sacrifices and feasts (36). I can say also - not only in front, but in it. This idea was supported by some of the recently finds in the tombs near Shipka. In the tomb under the mound "Helvetzia" was found a groove in the antechamber, which leads to the dromos, together with a sacrifice of a horse (37). Skeletons of horses were found in the antechambers and in front of the facade of several Thracian tombs (38). This possesses the question about the visits of the tombs in the Antiquity. There are a lot of traces of these visits - the doorstills are worn, there are gouges from the move of the doors. Then how the visitors entered, hence the body of the horse was on the way in, what was done and what was seen inside the chamber, what was the ritual? All this questions make me think, that the sacrifices of horses were several at the same place and the bodies were removed, and only the last one was left at the place, just before the entrance was finally covered with ground. It is possible, that the visit of the tombs has its important place in the honor, given to the Thracian ruler and his heroisation. Diana Gergova connects all that with rituals of segmentation of the bodies, done after the funeral and connected with the faith in immortality (39). Georgy Kitov recently named a lot of the tombs mausoleums and temples (40), but these are notions, which need to be clarified. During the Antiquity the mausoleums were buildings, which served as a tomb and a memorial for the ruler. One of the most significant among them is the mausoleum in Halikarnas - the tomb of king Mausol, after which all such buildings received that name. I want to pay attention on the fact, that they have a structure, which is different from that of the Thracian tombs. Also nobody was going in them after the funeral. Different was also the structure of the temples and the heroons. The idea for the visitors, which were going regularly in the tombs is most alike the contemporary mausoleums, examples of which we have seen in Sofia, Moskow, Ankara, Peking, etc. Visitors, I am sure, have entered the ancient tombs, but there is no need to mix notions from the Antiquity and from nowadays.

My research, in difference with that of an archeologist, is connected with the architecture of the tombs and not with the finds in them. But more information about the functions of the tombs and the rituals in them can be useful for clarifying the use of the different parts of the tombs. A major part of the tombs were found empty. In some cases there are funerals under the floor - in the antechambers of the tomb at Mezek (41). Maybe in other tombs was done the same. The tombs in Thracia were built in a short period - V-III c.B.C. The question what changes, what reasons bring up to their building, is still open. Maybe all that was due to some changes in the ideology,

the faith and the rituals of the Thracian noblemen. But one thing is clear - a moment arrived, in which all the tombs were closed (with doors or with stones) and covered with ground, so they passed under the mound through the millenniums up to the present days. They keep in them the traces of the old, pre-greek tradition and they are totally different from the Greek tradition during the classic times. They are connected with the Hellenistic world and have an important place in the cultural exchange during it. In Roman times, a lot of tombs with cradle vault were built here - at Silistra (42), Sofia, Plovdiv (43), etc. That shows how strong were all these traditions here.

The major part of the Thracian tombs are now in a very poor condition. Some of them are left without any restoration. The most important among them - the tombs at Kazanlack and Svestary are in the World Heritage List. A lot needs to be done for the protection of these precious monuments, so they can be open to public and in the same time kept for the future. At Kazanlack visitors can see a very well done copy of the tomb and its decoration, with equal size and quality. At Svestary there are plans for reconstruction of parts of the decoration - a door with tree part near the tomb, in the protecting construction. For opening to the public there is a need of a modern climatic installation. The same problems exist in connections with the tombs, recently found in the so-called Valley of the Thracian Kings near the town of Shipka.

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**ABBREVIATIONS:**

ABSA- Annual of the British school at Athens.

AJA- American Journal of Archaeology.

BIAB- Bulletin de l'Institut Bulgar d'archeologie.

BMSB- Bulletin na Museite v Severna Bulgaria - Bulletin of the Museums in North Bulgaria.

GNPB- Godisnik na Narodnata Biblioteka v Plovdiv - Annual Report of the Plovdiv Library.

VIAS- Vish Institute za Architrctura i Stroitelstvo - High Institute of Architecture and Building - now University of Architecture, Building and Geodesy.