

GRAVES WITH ROUND STONE WREATHS FROM THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD IN EASTERN MACEDONIA

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Abstract. *The research has been situated in the region of Eastern Macedonia, on the mountains: Ograzden, Plachkovitsa and Osogovo. The mayor characteristic of these several recently discovered necropolises is that they appear on high altitude, ranging 800 m, up to 1.400 m above sea level. The period in which they are present is taking almost three centuries, from the end of the 1 AD till the end of the 3 AD. The graves are only with cremated deceased, and the cremations were done on the exact place of the burial. The grave pits were framed with wreath of stones, mostly with circular form, but they also appear in ellipsoid or rectangular form. Above them were raised small mounts with diameter of 0,80 m to 10 m, with height of 1 m. The burial inventory is very rich. Mostly there are ceramic vessels done on a pottery wheel, characteristic for the entire Balkan region and wider from the period of the roman domination. We are giving special attention on the pottery done on hand, which is conservative feature of the older traditions of the population from the territory of Macedonia. The presence of the weapons is surprisingly big, especially on the necropolises settled on Ograzden and Plachkovitsa, as well as the ritual of its melting before it was put as a burial offering.*

Until only six years ago the mountain regions of eastern Macedonia were almost completely unexcavated. There were no or only scarce data for the life in these regions during the ancient period. All known information was based on incomplete research. With the first archaeological excavations in 2001 which were taken in the proximity of the city of Delchevo i.e. on the Osogovo mountain, there were discovered for the first time considerable archaeological remains of settlements and necropolises from the Roman Imperial Period with types of graves as mentioned in the title of this presentation. The scientific interest was intensified on the Plachkovica mountain and particularly in 2003 with the systematic excavations on the Ograzden mountain near Novo Selo at the utmost south-east of Macedonia, which resulted in extraordinarily interesting and significant scientific discoveries that enriched and to a great extent changed our knowledge about life during the Roman rule in Eastern Macedonia (Fig.1).

With our excavations we have for the first time discovered on the territory of R. Macedonia round stone wreaths from the Roman Imperial Period framing one grave only, which is not necessarily a part of a small mound or together with other graves it is framed into a mound large in size but small in height.

The first two necropolises were discovered in the proximity of the villages of Dramche and Bigla. Both of them are at 800m above sea level, on the north-east slopes of the Osogovo mountains. At the site of Chiflik near Dramche, at 10 km northeast of Delchevo we discovered a necropolis comprised of small round tumuli 0.5m high, with a diameter ranging from 4 to 10 meters. This was the first discovery of this type of graves in the Republic of Macedonia. A part of this necropolis was destroyed more than 20 years ago when a road was built. In 2001 and 2002 the remaining of all 21 graves were explored. A mutual characteristics of these tumuli is that they were formed of amorphous river stones heaped on the grave, while the round wreath of each of the graves was formed of large stones. The rite of cremation was employed in all of them. In the middle part of each tumulus there was a shallow hole for the pyre onto which the deceased were burnt together with their clothes, jewelry and other belongings. After the cremation the burnt remains were supplemented with a large number of ceramic vessels, sometimes with glass ones, then coins and weapons (spears and knives) if the deceased was a male (Fig.3), and after that the grave was heaped with stones. Under these tumuli there is, in the most cases, only one burial, but there are several cases where the same grave was used again. The most specific was tumulus No19 (Fig.2), under which 9 graves were found, each

framed with a stone wreath. The analysis of the archaeological material has shown that this necropolis existed from the middle of the first century until the end of the third century. The best testimonies for dating are the coins, for instance the denarii from the reign of Neron, Trajan, Vitellius, Domitianus. There are also a large number of bronze coins from almost all emperors of this period. The discovered ceramic vessels are different in form, but common for the whole territory of the Roman Empire, such as jugs, chalices with printed ornaments, amphoras and plates. What is more specific is the presence of a large number of vessels made by hand, in form more similar to the vessels from prehistoric iron and bronze era, than to the ancient ones.

Very much similar to this necropolis is the small necropolis discovered at the site of Kozarnik near the village of Bigla, at 20km east of Delchevo. Here also we discovered burials under short tumuli, made of broken stones, with dimensions similar to the previously described. We explored 4 tumuli at this site, and we should emphasize that under one of the tumuli there were even 9 graves with cremation, while the other tumuli covered one to two burials. The grave supplements are to a great extent identical with those found in the necropolis near Dramche, which leads us to the conclusion that this necropolis existed in the period between the middle of the first and the end of the third century. In the proximity of both necropolises we discovered the settlements where the people lived. They are small settlements of open type, vicus, but due to lack of time and funds they have not been explored yet.

The necropolis of Gushterova Chukarka at the site of Crveno Pole (Fig.4) on the Ograzhden mountain near Novo Selo, is the most completely explored of all. The necropolis is located on a high dominant easily perceptible hill (Fig.5). From the north and the east the hill inclines steeply to the river bank, to the west via a mild saddle it is connected to the neighboring hill, to the south it descends deeply to the very foot of the mountain. Where nature was not protective enough, in order to be completely separated from everyday life, to the south and to the west it was enclosed by a wall. Thus, this space is not only a natural phenomenon - it does not consist of natural elements only- it has been subdued by man in accordance with his needs and thus transformed to serve his essential requirements which arise from his life philosophy. It was not an accident that the hill of lizards was chosen to be the place where life changes into eternity. By its climatic and other natural features this hill is unique in its surroundings. This was enough for the ancient people to give the hill a new dimension, namely they employed it for religious purposes. After heavy rains the surrounding peaks of Crveno Pole are clothed in thick mist, but Gushterova Chukarka bathes in the sun. And vice versa: when there is sun on the surrounding hills, there are clouds rising from the hill where eternity follows mortality.

The necropolis comprises an area of about 5000m² of which about 750m² (Fig.6) have been treated so far in the course of two exploring campaigns. 86 graves have been excavated, 82 of which are relevant for scientific analysis.

The pits are dug in the humus and most often in the rock which is the basic component of the entire hill. They are rectangular or elliptical in form (Fig.7) with dimensions depending on the age of the deceased: from 0.70 to 2.45m in length and 0.65 to 1.10m in width. The pits are relatively shallow, with depth ranging between 0.15 and 0.42m. They are with varying orientation: most often they are oriented in the NW-SE direction (26 of them), SW-NE (18), N-S (17), W-E (12), while we cannot precisely determine the orientation of 9 graves due to various damages.

In 8 cases the cremation of the deceased was not conducted in the grave pit. These grave pits do not contain remains from charred beams, cinder or ashes - only osteological remains were found. At this stage of excavation of the necropolis we still have not discovered the ustrina: the place where the deceased from these graves were cremated. The rest of the graves are of the bustum type, i.e. the funeral pyres were placed in the same pits where the deceased were buried. First, the shorter beams were arranged across the pits, then the thicker and the longer beams were placed along the previously dug grave pit (Fig.8). In order to keep the pyre stable, it was fixed by means of vertical pickets. Nails were also used to fix the pyre, so a great number of these were found in the graves. The remains of charred beams and the great quantity of ashes in the pits point to the fact that it was a large pyre with thick beams, which made an excellent basis for a big fire.

Although the pits are with varying orientation, it is evident that there was a tendency to place the deceased on the pyre so that to overlook the sunrise or the solar eclipse. The deceased was descended onto

the pyre in his garments only and probably with his personal jewellery. The fact that the accompanying objects are preserved in a good condition tells us that they were placed in the pit after the cremation. Only the small nails, used to fasten the leather shoes - kaligi, are preserved in their anatomic position - the sole means by which we determine the orientation of the deceased during the cremation rite. The deceased was exposed to a strong fire, which resulted in not very well preserved osteological remains the size of barely 1-2 centimeters; some of the graves have no osteological remains at all.

It is certain that in some of the graves, where we found a large quantity of cinder and ashes but no remains of charred beams, the fire was let to burn down completely. But in the greater number of cases, there are charred remains on the bottom of the grave pit that had been placed on the first row of the pyre. These charred remains may mean that the fire extinguished leaving the beams unburnt as there was a large quantity of ashes from the massive pyre. But it is very much probable that some of the pyres were extinguished immediately after the cremation was performed (Agre, Di~ev, 2000, p.36). It was confirmed by the anthropological analysis of the preserved osteological material, which showed that the osteological remains suffered some malformations due to having been treated with a liquid. In none of the graves the cremation was not separated from the cinder and ashes; on the contrary, the remains are mixed with the cinder and ashes all over the grave pit, so that we cannot think of a posthumous washing of the bones, especially if we have in mind that they have been preserved only in fragments. It is scarcely probable that these malformations might be the consequence of a ritual splashing or extinguishing the pyre with wine. We prefer to conclude that these malformations have to do with the fact that the pyre was extinguished with water. This often used to be the case when the deceased was buried in the same place where he had been cremated, although the burial was more often conducted with sand or earth rather than water (Pisarova 1995, p.21).

However, we should point out that in two of the graves the bones were separated from the cinder. In grave 44 above the remains of unburnt beams we found a ceramic vessel into which there were minimal remnants from a skull, a rib, a femur, a tibia and a fibula. The cremation remains probably belong to a graceful woman of about 50 years of age. The vessel is hand-made, with height of 24.5cm; it has the shape of an elongated cone, with a semicircle shoulder that turns into a cylindrical neck (Fig.9). The rim is protruded to the outside; it is ring-like and profiled. The vessel has two strip-like handles that start from the shoulder and end beneath the ring of the rim. The handles are decorated with two mildly profiled ribs and each has two nipple-like applications on the bow. The bottom is circular and concave. Average facture with a sand mixture, well-baked, light brown in colour. The large quantity of cinder and ashes and the unburnt beams testify to the fact that the cremation was executed at the same place where the urn was afterwards buried.

In grave 67 we also found a hand-made ceramic vessel. The absence of beams and cinder tells us that the cremation had been performed somewhere else and then the urn was placed in the grave pit. This vessel is 24.5cm high; it is biconical in shape, with a larger nether cone (Fig.10). Its bottom is flat and a little emphasized, its rim is wide and unprofiled. It has two small, thick horseshoe-like handles. It is massive, with rough facture, made of non-cleaned clay with a mixture of mica and it has non-homogenous brown colour. Although the scarce osteological remains do not allow sexual differentiation of the deceased person aged about 40, the accompanying objects undoubtedly prove that it was also a woman that was buried in this urn.

Despite the fact that both vessels were fragmented and devastated, it is certain that they were used as urns. The cremated remains of the deceased, women in both cases, were discovered under the vessel fragments. The pits did not contain osteological material.

Only 5 of the graves did not contain grave supplements. But as they were later susceptible to devastation, it is very much likely that some gifts were left in them after the cremation.

The closest family members left to the deceased objects that reflected their economical, social or even hierarchical status of his life on earth. They believed that the soul of the deceased lived at the place where the grave was, that is why they left not only jewelry and weapons but also all the life necessities such as money, food and drink.

Most numerous are the ceramic vessels (Fig.11). They can be found in all of the graves that contain grave supplements. They were probably placed as grave supplements which served to hold the food and drink intended for the deceased. They were descended into the grave after the rite of cremation was over and after the pyre was cooled down to a great extent. They are various in shape and type. Some of them were made on a potter's wheel but there are also some hand-made specimens. There are small chalices and glasses with one or two handles, plates of various depth and some larger pots. These small chalices with two vertical handles are the most frequent grave supplement, which makes us think that during the burial ceremony the people drank wine and then left the chalices into the graves after they had filled them with the same drink again.

There is a considerable number of fragmented ceramics found everywhere in the grave - from the top to the bottom - which may mean that certain type of ceramics did not function as grave supplements but was used during the rite of cremation. The fact that the fragments are a bit burnt by the fire confirms by all means that the vessels were being broken during the cremation rite, i.e. they were probably thrown directly onto the pyre while the deceased was being cremated (Brusić 1985, p.143). In almost all cases it is a hand-made ceramics of rough facture. The breaking of vessels as part of the burial rite and the burial ceremony is not an unknown phenomenon at the area around Crveno Pole in almost all periods of the history. Evidence for the oldest rite of breaking vessels in Macedonia was found at the necropolis of Klucka - Hipodrom near Skopje; namely a great number of fragmented ceramics were discovered there dating from the transition period between the Bronze and the Iron Age (Mitrevski 1997, p.34). This rite continued in the following period. Although with a somewhat changed burial tradition - the deceased were only inhumed - the rite of breaking the vessels continued in the Iron Age at the tumular necropolises near the village of Karaorman, which is in the Stip region (Mikulčič 1961, p.55). Broken ceramic fragments were also found at the tumuli in Dabici - Sopot near Veles (Mitrevski 1997, p.94), located in various places on the tumuli, or grouped among the graves and stones. We do not think it would be difficult to interpret the symbolic meaning of this rite. The breaking symbolized the release of the soul from the body and easier or faster departure to eternal life.

Very often there are vessels which are positioned with their bottoms up (Fig.12). These are usually chalices with two vertical handles made on a potter's wheel, but there are also plates, hand-made glasses with or without handles, and hand-made pots. No matter how many of them are in the grave, only one specimen is positioned with its bottom up. The exception to this rule can be seen in grave 77 where two hand-made pots are stuck one into the other with their bottoms up; anyhow they are not into the grave but onto the tombstone construction. Also, in grave 64 there are two small chalices placed with their bottoms up and they are covered by a large fragment of a hand-made vessel with a horseshoe-like handle. The custom of placing the vessels with their bottoms up was very common in South-Eastern Europe in the course of all the civilization periods, from the Late Neolithic and the Early Eneolithic (Hoti 1994, p.183-203) up to the period that this text is concerned with; the custom is connected with the so called Old European cultures, i.e. the domestic people. In the complex of the akin cultures of Vucedol-Kostolac in Croatia and Serbia, as well as at the site of Vinica from the culture Gumelnita in Bulgaria, these vessels were placed over the head, the stomach or the hips of the inhumed (Hoti 1994, p.184-186). The oldest specimen of such a vessel in Macedonia, placed with its bottom up, has been discovered in the necropolis of Treskavec near Prilep (Mikulčič 1966, T.XXVII, fig.37b) and it is from a much later date, from the Hellenic period. From the Roman Imperial period there is only one specimen of a revolved vessel - it has been found at the tumulus Sreden Rid, village of Bigla, near Delcevo (Jovanov 2004, p.23, fig.24), where the burial ceremony was conducted with cremation. In Bulgaria there are several specimens from this period. In grave № 7/77 from the necropolis near the village of Drasan, region of Vraca, there are two revolved vessels (Mašov 1975, p.42). In tumulus VII, near the village of Visegrad, region of Krdzali, there were two burial ceremonies with cremation. In both cases the cremated remains from the deceased were piled and covered with deep plates (Dremzisova-Nelčanova 1980, p.24). The example from the necropolis of Viminacium in Serbia is the most similar to the previous specimen - namely the cremated remains used to be placed in urns and then the urns were turned with their bottoms up (Zotovih, Q.-Jordovih 1990, p.77, 85, 102). The explanations why the vessels were turned upside down are various, but mainly there are two: to keep the food (Hoti 1994, p.186) longer and to prevent the deceased from turning into a vampire. If those were vessels for keeping the food

only, we would encounter them a lot more often, because the revolved vessel was intended to prevent the evil from the deceased, i.e. to prevent the souls of the dead to return to the earth (Hoti 1994, p.190). But let us not forget that this was the case in the Late Neolithic and Eneolithic period, when the deceased were inhumed. The vessels from these periods were positioned over the head of the deceased (in Vucedol) or over their stomach, as was the case in Gradac and Vinica. Our cases and all the above mentioned are from the Roman Imperial Period, when the deceased were cremated. There is no skeleton and we cannot determine neither the position of the skull nor that of the stomach, i.e. it was impossible to place the vessel over the vital organs. Nevertheless, in tumulus VII near the village of Visegrad, region of Krdzali, in both graves the cremated remains were gathered and covered with a deep plate. The discovered urns in the necropolis of Viminacium are in the same position. However, we must ask ourselves why this type of burial, with turned vessels and urns, is so rare. In the necropolis near the village of Desan out of 34 graves only one grave contains revolved vessels; in the necropolis near the village of Visegrad there are 20 tumuli, but only in one of them the cremated remains are piled under a deep plate. In the necropolis in Viminacium there are 292 graves with cremation, 15 of which contain the cremated remains in urns, and only four of the urns are placed with their rim down. Of the remaining 11, only two are covered with deep plates (Zotovih, Q.-Jordovih 1990, p.100, 108). We ask ourselves, does this phenomenon have to do with a certain ritual connected with life after death; were the members of the community afraid only of certain individuals, perhaps priests or magi? Perhaps the deceased whose cremated remains were piled under a plate were extremely evil; or they did not depart willingly, and therefore the living members of the community had to take care of preventing them from revenge (Zotovih, Q.-Jordovih 1990, p.190)?

Very often, weapons were also placed as grave supplements (Fig.13). Most numerous among them are the knives and the spears. The spears almost always go in a pair, except in one case. And always with other type of weapon. They are always accompanied by battle knives, while in three cases they are accompanied by axes and in one case only by a sword (Fig.14). According to its position, it is very likely that the weapon was placed in the grave after the cremation, although the physical condition of the specimens discovered in graves 20 and 59 may lead us to think that the weapon was on the pyre together with the deceased or was placed in the grave while the pyre was still hot. All the graves containing weapon also contain bronze rings which served to fasten the weapon, plus there are other parts of the waist set, most often represented by buckles and saltaleones. The other sword of the Ringknaufschwert type was found in grave 72 (Fig. 13, 1) together with two ceramic weighs for a loom. A pair of similar weighs was also found in grave 70. The scarce remains from the cremation make it difficult to determine the sex of the deceased; however we are certain that in the first case it was a man, although the weighs interfere with the image of the proud warrior who did not allow to have his sword bent. On the other hand, the anthropological analysis of grave 70, with a dose of reserve, led us into the conclusion that a woman was buried in it, which may be presumed by the accompanying objects, especially by the absence of weapon. The weapon specimens are characterized by the fact that they had been disabled before being placed in the graves. This is especially true for the spears, battle knives and one of the swords (Fig.13, 2). The weapon was either bent (Fig.13, 2,4) or, when this action was impossible, its top part was simply cut off (Fig.13, 3). The message is obvious: those who chose Gushterova Chukarka for their eternal habitation believed that they departed to a better world. They believed in a peaceful life after death where weapons would not be used.

Some elements of the burial rite at the necropolis are common throughout the site of Crveno Pole as far as the birth of civilizations, but the act of bending the weapons before being put into the graves is not analogous to anywhere else on the territory of Macedonia or abroad. It was by no means an unknown act; on the contrary, it was very much in practice, but the regions that might have been influential are distant from our site both in place and time. The Taurisians, that inhabited the central and the eastern parts of present Slovenia and north-west Croatia, did this bending of weapons throughout the period of the latén (Božić 1987, p.887). More precisely, this custom was very common in the necropolises in south-west Romania: as far back as 170/160 - 50 years BC (Sîrbu, Arsenescu 2006, p.167).

One more peculiar custom at the necropolis of Gushterova Chukarka is the placing of clay weaving weighs as grave supplements. The peculiarity was even greater when we discovered that the weighs were

placed not only in female graves, but also in a male grave where beside the weights we found a typically male status symbol: a sword of the Ringknaufschwert type. This was of course challenging enough to be put into this work, particularly because we have not still come up with a reasonable explanation. It is by all means a rare phenomenon. The only analogy that the author of this study managed to find was from Pelagonija (In western Macedonia), during the Hellenic-Roman period (Mikulčić 1996, p.80).

We are surprised by the absence of jewellery (Fig.15); earrings, of which one is golden, were found in only three of the graves; in twelve graves we found 11 bracelets, all of them in fragments. Most probably the jewellery was with the deceased during the cremation and did not survive the fire. The presence of melted pearls made of glass paste, which were found in some of the graves, encourages this supposition. Men also used to wear bracelets: in grave 70 we found a bracelet together with the weapon set. In some of the graves where we are sure that women were buried we found knives as grave supplements. These are usually small arched knives (Fig.13,7-8), different from the battle ones as they were neither bent nor had their tops cut off. The keys, which speak of the right to the new home or protection in case of danger (Demo 1985, p.123), although in small number, were found in women's graves only. The fibulas, which are also very rare but which were by all means on the pyre, can be seen both in male and female graves.

Coins were found in 16 graves (Fig.16); their overall number is 21. The leaving of coins as a tax for Haron and it has already been treated and explained as a common practice in the necropolises. For instance, Aristophanes in his work *Frogs* (140, 270) speaks of a tax of two oboli, while authors of a later date mention one obolus or a coin put in the mouth of the deceased. Most often there is only one coin in the grave; one grave only contains two specimens, while two graves have three coins each. They are bronze and silver. They were burning together with the deceased, but were also placed in the grave after the cremation was finished, as part of the burial rite. The oldest coins date back from the second half of the I century - they are silver denarii from the reign of the Emperor Domitian; the coins from the reign of Hadrian, Antonius Pius, Julia Maia, Julia Mamaia, Mark Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Probus and Aurelian are evidence that this necropolis was also used in the course of the II and III century AD.

In two graves we also found remains from animal bones. In grave 45 the bones were discovered above the layer with cremation remains, while in grave 52 the bones were burning on the pyre together with the deceased, so their remains were mixed with the remains of the deceased. We are very much certain that in the first case the bones were leftovers from the burial feast, while in the second case it is very likely that the deceased was burnt together with his pet.

Almost regularly in all of the graves we discovered nuts: walnuts and hazelnuts. It is hard to determine whether they were leftovers from the burial feast or were left as grave supplements. But the fact that they are whole may lead us to think that the nuts were left to the deceased. As a matter of fact, the leaving of such fruits in the graves was noticed in the West necropolis in Stobi, but only in the graves with cremation that originate from the Augustian period (Wesolowsky 1973, p.134). One closer analogy can be found in the tumulus of Studena Cesma, in the region of Delcevo (Јованов 2004, p.28).

After the burial ceremony was completed, the pit was filled with earth and then a stone wreath was formed around the grave pit. That is why some grave pits do not share the same orientation with their wreaths. This is particularly true with the elliptical wreaths. Very often the grave pits are eccentrically positioned in regard to their circular wreaths (Fig.17). The hypothesis that the grave pits were first filled with earth and the stone wreath was formed afterwards can be confirmed with the fact that very rarely the cremation layer touches the level of the wreath. Almost regularly there is a layer of 0.10-0.40m of earth between the cremation remains and the stone wreath. In 14 graves this space is filled with stones too. Stones also serve as a filling in the 4 graves with rectangular wreaths. The rest of the wreaths are filled with one row up to three layers of stones. Most often these are fillings with no specific ordering; however at grave 78 they are almost radially arranged (Fig.18). In almost all of the cases there are fragments of broken vessels among the stones, while at grave 77 there are two entire vessels placed one into the other with their bottoms up.

Certain grave pits are located under the stone wreaths, which is evident by the discovery of grave supplements after the removal of the stone wreaths. The filling with earth of the space enclosed with the stone wreath opens another dilemma which will be treated further in this text. The stone wreaths are most

often circular in form. Rarely did we come across elliptical ones and very rarely, in 4 cases only, we saw rectangular stone wreaths. They are composed of round stones, limestone rock or stones broken off the sand rock, which is the basis of the hill where the necropolis lies. They are of different size, which depends on the size of the grave pits. The circular wreaths are with diameter ranging from 0.70 to 4m, of which the wreath of grave 27 is almost ideally circular. The elliptical wreaths are 0.70 to 2.90m long and up to 2m wide. The rectangular ones have dimensions of 1.60m in length and 0.85m in width. It is also possible for two graves, each with its own stone wreaths - most often elliptical in form - to possess a mutual circular wreath. Such is the case of graves 21 and 22, but their mutual wreath was damaged in devastations of a later date.

The main dilemma is: whether at Gushterova Chukarka, the necropolis with cremation burial rite, the deceased were buried in flat graves or small tumuli raised above the stone wreaths? One year after discovering grave 27, which appeared immediately after removing the surface layer not thicker than 5cm, the stones from the wreaths composed of sand rock began to disintegrate, which means that they cannot endure in open air under atmospheric influence. Grave 27 has a dominant position in the necropolis - practically the necropolis spreads around grave 27. However, grave 27, whose wreath is 4 meters in diameter and a grave pit of almost 2m of length, showed only 37 shoe nails as grave supplements. The case is similar with grave 71, which has a wreath diameter of 3.50m and a grave pit with dimensions of 2.45x1.10m - the grave also appeared very soon after digging and only shoe nails and a knife fragment were found in it as grave supplements. There are more examples of this kind: sometimes the wreaths are damaged and the cremation layer is very shallow, almost under the very surface. The grave supplements found in the graves, even when the stone wreaths are damaged, were always discovered under a layer of stones or under a layer of earth which is at least about 20cm thick. These facts make us think that there were small tumuli raised above the stone wreaths. In the course of time the tumuli were, due to various reasons, leveled to the stone wreaths or a little above them. The reasons may be seen in the fact that this area was used as farming land, plus the necropolis often was misused by illegal diggers. The density of the graves only and the stone wreaths touching closely to each other speak in favour of some other conclusion - that those were in fact flat graves with stone wreaths arranged around the grave pit.

In the Republic of Macedonia, the new way of inhuming, with circular stone wreaths around the graves was first used in Pelagonija (western Macedonia), at the famous tumulus from "Visoi", in Beranci, near Bitola. The wreath was formed around the central grave - a cist with a bowed inhumed deceased, and it dates back from the transitional period between Bronze and Iron Age (Митревски 1997, p.103). This way of burial continued with certain variations in the Iron Age, particularly in eastern Macedonia, in the area around Stip (Нацев, Јованов 1996, p.45-46) and to its north, in the proximity of Veles. Those grave are tumuli which regularly have several inhumations within one stone wreath. Although all of the burials in these tumuli are with inhumation, the way of forming the grave pit is very much similar to the way grave pits in Gushterova Chukarka were formed. The greatest similarity can be noticed with the burials in the small tumuli from the necropolis of "Krivi Dol", in Radanje near Stip (Митревски 1997, p.90) and especially with the burials in "Dabici", in Sopot near Veles (Митревски 1997, p.93-94). The grave pits were enclosed with stone wreaths, most often elliptical and rectangular in form, then were covered with earth and amorphous stones to form a small tumulus. All this was organized within a circular area marked with the mutual stone wreath above which the mutual tumulus was raised. Near the end of the Iron Age the tumular way of burying was left and cremation was accepted as a dominant sepulchral ritual. However, the forms of grave constructions were not left, particularly during the Classical and the Early Hellenic period, when the large pits filled with a great quantity of ashes and cinder were marked with stone wreaths and covered with earth and amorphous stones to make irregular rectangles or ellipses. This happened very often in Pelagonija (Mikulčić 1966, p.61). These forms continued during Augustan time, not only in Pelagonija (Mikulčić 1966, p.80), but also in Stobi (Mikulčić 1973, p.74) when they appeared for the first time. However, Stobi is much more relevant for our study, as here during the Augustan period the stone wreaths appeared again (Mikulčić 1973, grave 21, p.74; Wesolowski 1973, grave 95, p.110; graves 260, 273, p.135) Because of the intense use of the necropolis in the following periods, all of the 4 graves that we discovered were damaged by the later burials. The damages are especially evident in the stone wreaths, so that we are not able to say whether small tumuli were raised above the grave pits. We are now approaching the Roman Imperial Period, the

temporal frame of existence of the necropolis Gushterova Chukarka at the site of Crveno Pole. Until a few years ago these cremation burials under small tumuli enclosed by stone wreaths were completely unknown in Macedonia. The first data came from the excavations in 2001-2002, when 5 tumuli from the area of Pijanec, region of Delcevo (Jovanov 2004, p.11), were excavated, while in 2003 several circular grave constructions were discovered from the surroundings of Kriva Palanka. This was the year when systematic excavations were begun at the site of Crveno Pole too.

This way of burial was long ago noticed in the wider region. In 1961-62 Romanian archaeologist Floca O. excavated at the villa rustica near Cincis, region of Hunedoara, and discovered 17 graves 10 of which are with circular stone wreaths and small tumuli (Floca 1965, p.163-194), which dated back from 2-3 century AD (Floca 1965, p.192). In 1971-71 near the village of Drasan, region of Vraca, in west Bulgaria an overall number of 34 graves were discovered, 33 of which were with a cremation rite (Машов 1975, p.41-49). All of the grave pits were encircled with circular, elliptical or rectangular stone wreaths. Although tumuli are not mentioned, it is very likely that they had been destroyed in the course of time, as the space where the necropolis lies was for a long time used as a farming land and was treated with farming machinery (Машов 1975, p.41). This was also the case with the tumular necropolis near the village of Visegrad, region of Krdzali, in south Bulgaria, where all of the 20 explored tumuli possess stone wreaths (Дремзисова-Нелчинова 1980, p.18-26), especially the smaller ones which have a diameter of several meters and whose height does not exceed 0.70m. With the excavations from 1999-2001 at the necropolis in the village of Zabel, region of Trnsko, in west Bulgaria, a part of a flat necropolis was explored, the grave pits of which were encircled with circular, elliptical and rectangular wreaths (Владимирова-Паунова 2003, p.215-225). Excavators also mention some tumuli as part of the necropolis, but they have not explored them yet, so that we do not have a precise description of their size. All of these necropolises from the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria date back from 2 until the first half of the 4 century AD.

At this stage of exploration, when scarcely 12% of the overall necropolis has been treated, it is difficult to speak about the social organization or the concentration of the graves (Fig.19). Nevertheless, just one look at the plan of the necropolis bears evidence that it did have its own rules upon which it was organized. It is beyond doubt that the most appreciated burial spot was at the very peak of the hill, particularly the space around grave 27, which is the largest of all the excavated graves. All around it there are densely arranged grave constructions with stone wreaths one next to another. This is the place where the richest graves have been discovered, with abundance of weapons. It is upon us to find out with our further explorations whether the members of the military aristocracy used to be buried here. However, even now we are certain that the several graves whose wreaths are arranged in a row were the burial place of one and the same family, or at least of very close relatives. There are a few more similar situations, which is undoubtful evidence about the family principle (beside the hierarchical one) upon which this necropolis was organized.

The burial rite at the necropolis of Ghusterova Chukarka at the site of Crveno Pole is an image of the "contemporary" idea of life after death, containing a whole value system derived from everyday life, in the temporal frame from the end of 1 until the end of 3 century AD. Let us not forget, however, the specific living conditions that were closely connected to the geographical and cultural area of Crveno Pole. Accepting influences that were close to their sensibilities, into which they recognized themselves, the inhabitants of Crveno Pole built their own original sepulchral rhetoric. But the fundamentals of this rite, the whole mental and spiritual system of those people, were based on strong conservatism kept in their collective memory, which was waiting for a good moment to come back as a dominant form of expressing their centuries-old beliefs and traditions. Thus we come back at the starting postulate of our text: The burial, together with the belief in "afterlife" and the customs that accompany it belong to those, basically conservative, events that have been handed down from generation to generation and have remained unchanged in the course of hundreds even thousands of years.

Dragulevo is a plateau on the Ograzhden mountain at 1400 m above sea level where in 2003 we discovered the last necropolis of this type. With the surface prospections done at this site we registered 3 locations abundant in remains from the late Roman Imperial Period and late ancient history (Fig.20). The archaeological excavations carried out in 2007, immediately after the excavations at Crveno Pole, although

small in size gave impressive results. The necropolis where the excavations were done is unfortunately a part of a mountain road, which has caused a considerable damage leaving only the grave pits. Although none of the stone wreaths was wholly preserved, the quantity of stones and their position offer enough evidence for us to assume that they were arranged around grave pits.

Here also, as in the previously presented necropolises the deceased were cremated and buried at the spot of cremation, in irregular rectangular or in elliptical pits (Fig.21). The cremations were not so intensive, which results in larger osteological remains, particularly from the longer bones of the skull. This, together with the grave orientation, which is most often W-E, might announce the value system to follow. The deceased were wealthy, if we judge from the artifacts discovered as grave supplements (Fig.22). The male graves are abundant in weapons (Fig.24,1-5), represented by spears and axes, while the female graves are of course full of jewellery (Fig.25,1-3) and ceramics (Fig.24,6-10). It is usual that the small vessels were put into the larger ones (Fig.23). The quantity of coins is very impressive; they are found in both male and female graves and were usually left in leather bags. 26 coins in a single grave speak of a great economic power and a high social status of those who were buried here.

The material from the excavated graves, primarily the coins of the reign of Gordian, speak for the time being that the necropolis was in use in the second half of the 3 century, although certain ceramic materials and certain coins that have not been conserved yet may lead to the conclusion that the necropolis was also used during the first half of the 4 century AD.

In the end, we will mention the necropolis of Crkvishte on the mountain of Plachkovica. It has not been excavated yet, but let us hope to begin with excavations there next year. The surface prospection showed that it was a necropolis identical in its characteristics with those previously mentioned. The artifacts excavated at the necropolis of Crkvishte also contribute to this conclusion (Fig.26).

All of the necropolises that are the subject to our interest and are part of this presentation are located very high above sea level: both necropolises on the Osogovo mountain are at 800m, while the necropolises on Plachkovica and Ograzhden are at 1400m above sea level. They are separate micro-geographic regions located in the deep bosom of the mountain with carefully chosen habitations, usually spread around several hills in a row, protected by high peaks that slope down to the south. This enables a whole day exposure to the sun and protection from the north winds, particularly in the winter period. In the proximity of all of the site there are several springs, or smaller rivers, around the valleys of which there are pastures and fertile land. The surrounding higher mountains are grown in thick woods rich in all kinds of game and rich in wood that can be used both for construction and heating. The necropolises are usually located on dominating hills that can be easily seen from all around. In addition to this, they are always very close to the settlements. All of them are parts of complex archaeological sites, with settlements and refugiums in their proximity. But for the time being, only at the site of Crveno Pole the excavations of the necropolis have been accompanied with the excavations of the settlement and its economic part. The results speak of a well organized community. Together with the settlement of Dragulevo and Crkvishte, they continued to exist in the following centuries as well, which can be testified by the new necropolises that are either in their proximity or are mixed with the older ones. Here the deceased were buried in graves that were dug in the rock, as deep as 1.50m, with stone cysts to mark the grave, with perfectly smoothed pit walls, almost hermetically closed, with finely chiseled stone plates (Fig.27). Their orientation is W-E, with not a single exception. The deceased were buried here after the inhabitants accepted Christianity. They were orthodox; they did not leave any supplements in their graves. They presented before God with the richness of their souls.

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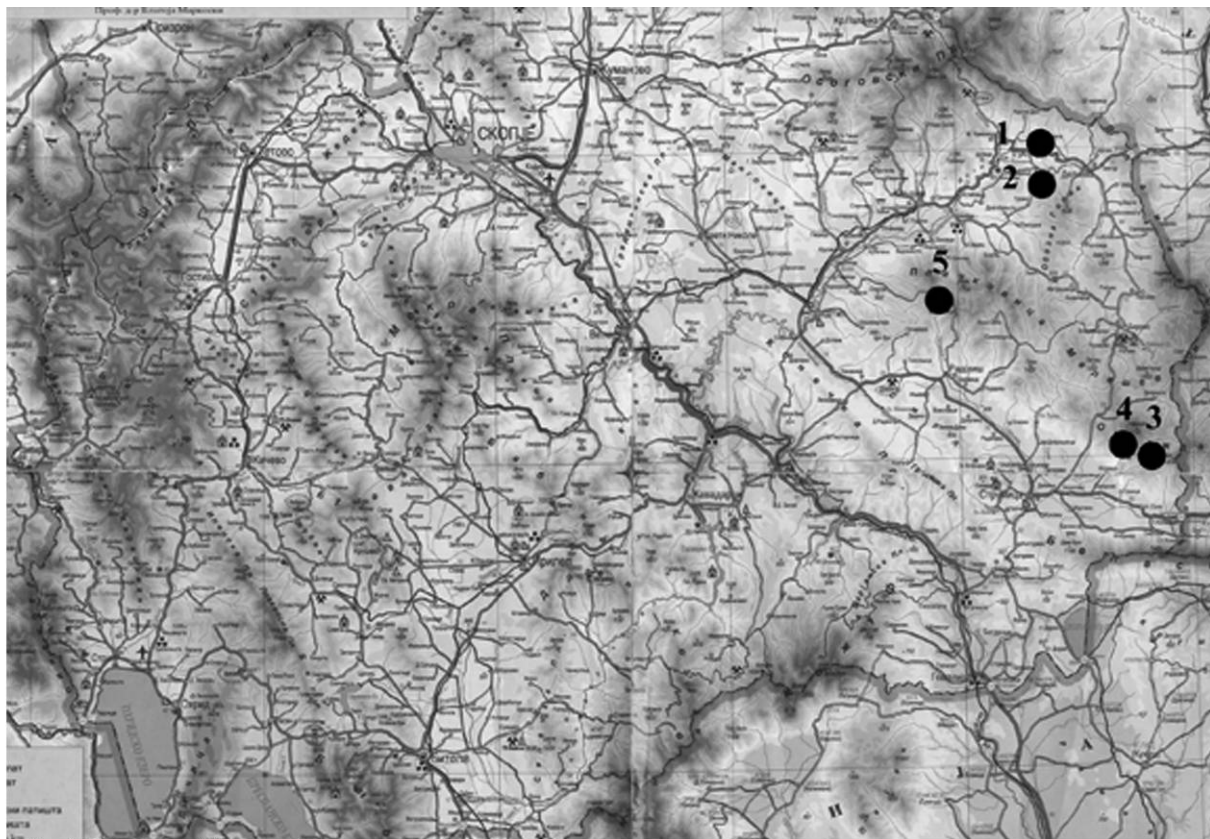


Fig.1.Graves with round stone wreaths:

1.Dramche, 2.Bigla, 3.Crveno Pole, 4.Dragulevo, 5.Crkvishte.



Fig.2. Tumulus No 19, Dramche



Fig.3.pottery vesels (1-4) and weapons (5-7) from Dramche



Fig.4.Site of Crveno Pole



Fig.5. Necropolis of Gushterova Chukarka

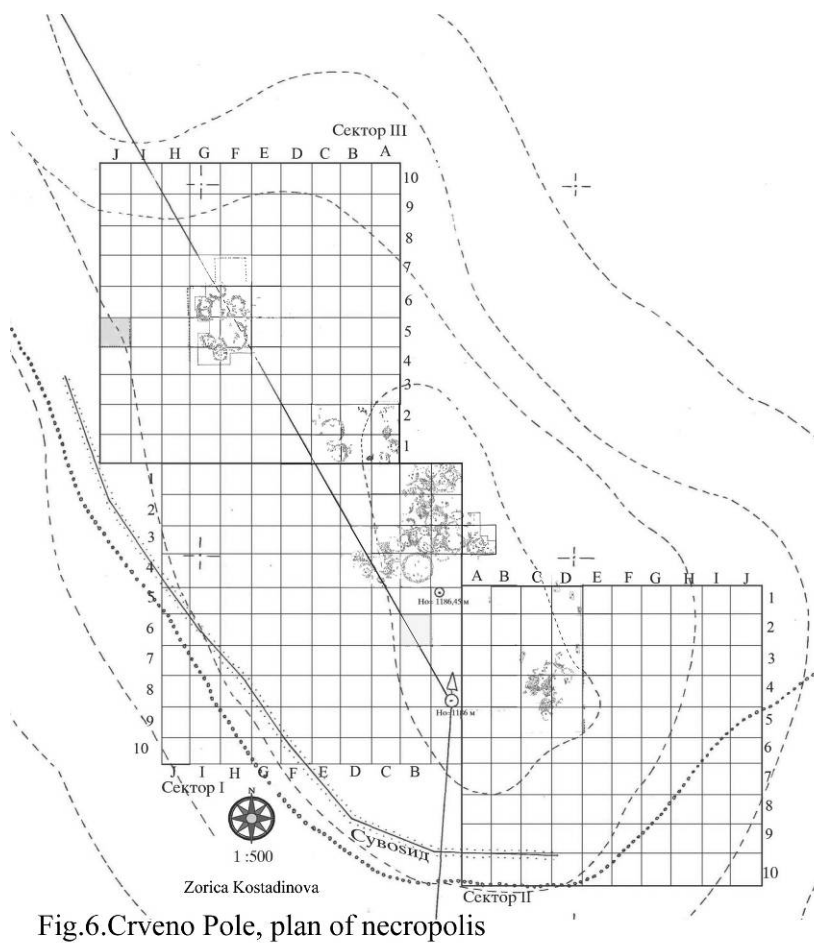


Fig.6. Crveno Pole, plan of necropolis



Fig.9. Urn from grave 44

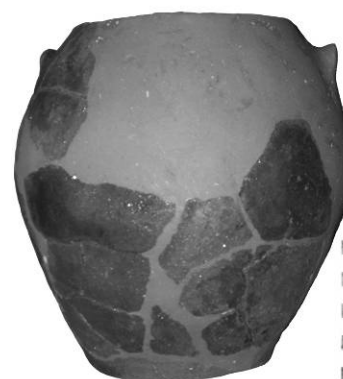


Fig.10. Urn from grave 67



Fig.7. Grave pit



Fig.8. Funeral pyre



Fig.11.Crveno Pole, hand-made pottery (1-3) and pottery made on a potter's wheel (4-5)

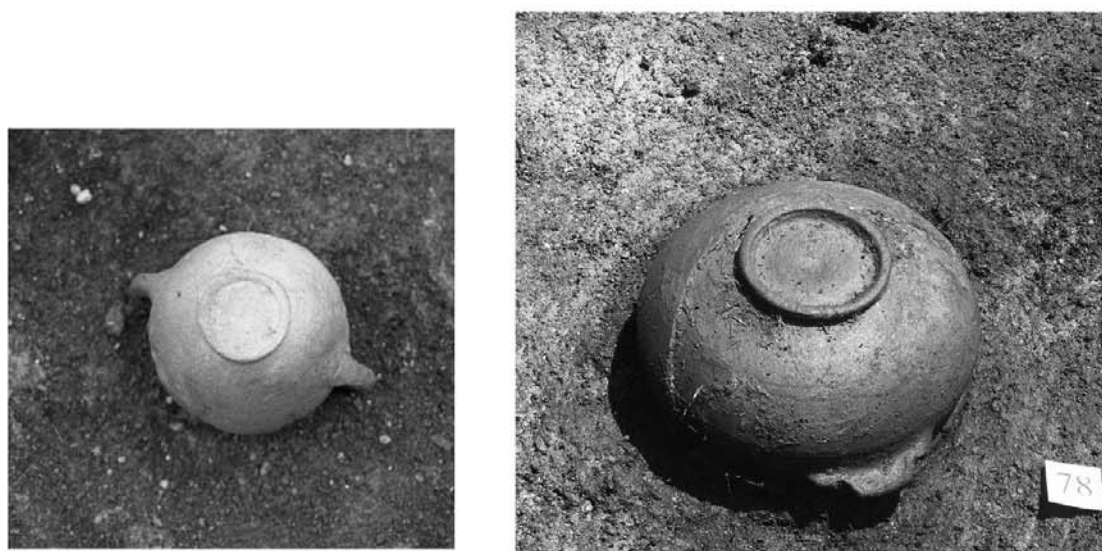


Fig.12.vessels with their bottom up

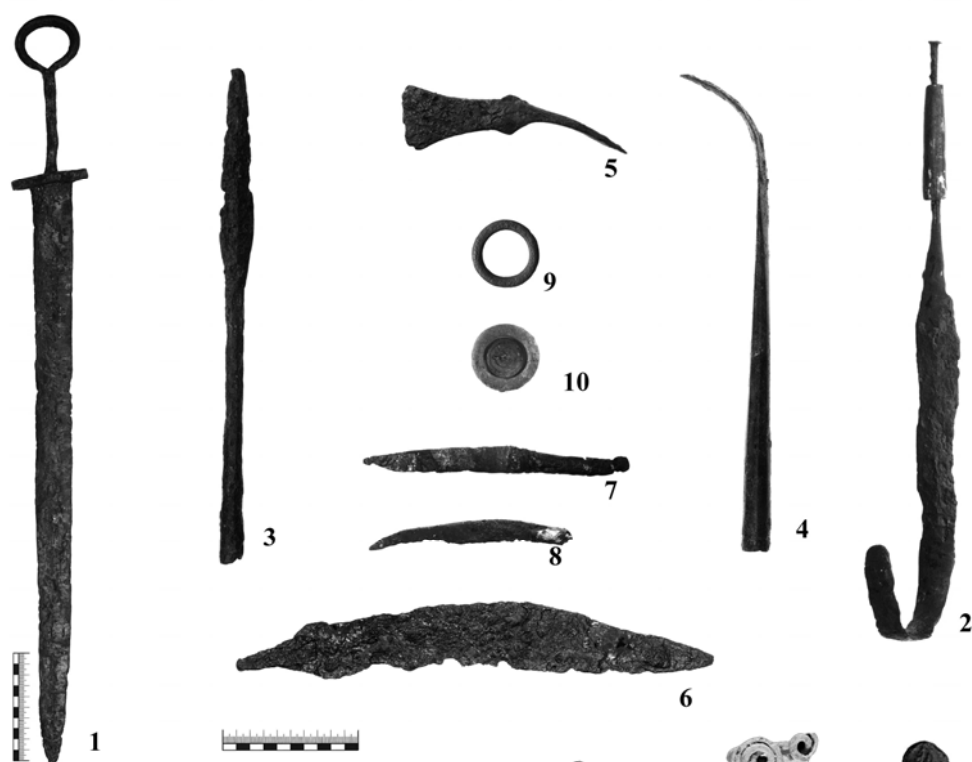


Fig. 13. Crveno Pole, weapons from necropolis



Fig. 14. grave 22a



Fig. 15. Jewellery



Fig. 16. Coins



Fig.17.Eccentrically positioned grave pit



Fig.18.Grave 78, almost radially arranged stone wreath

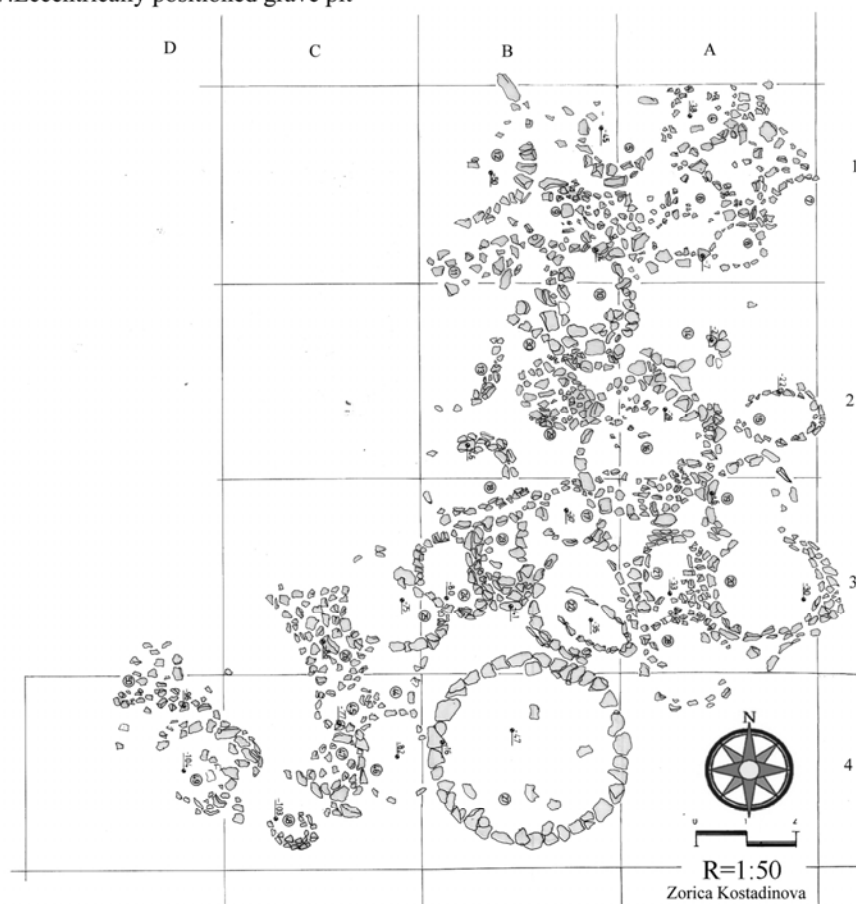
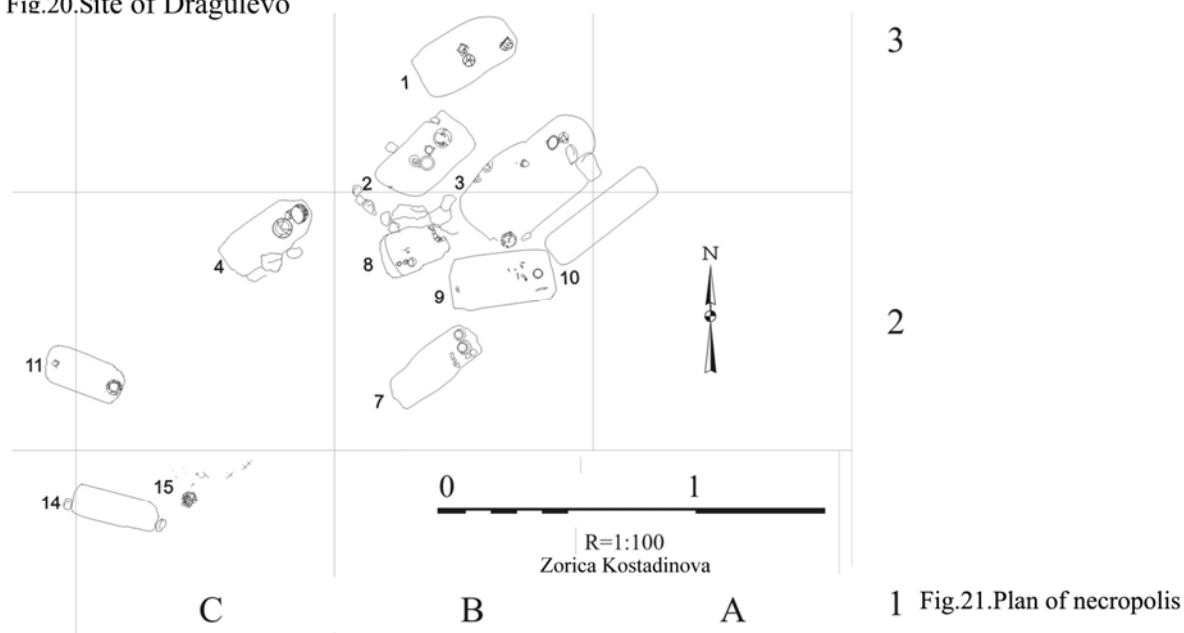


Fig.19.Concentration of the graves



Fig.20.Site of Dragulevo



1 Fig.21.Plan of necropolis

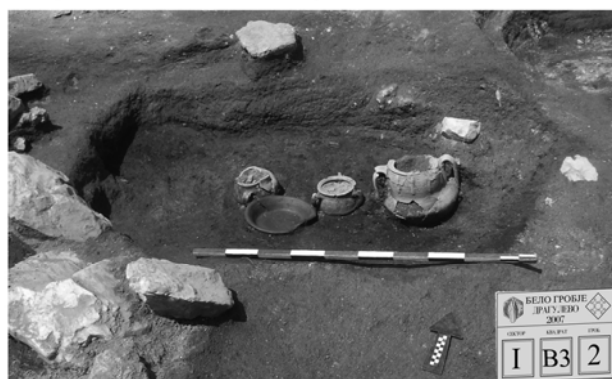


Fig.22. Grave No 2



Fig.23.Small vessels were put into the larger ones



Fig.24.Dragulevo, weapons (1-5), pottery (6-10)



Fig.26. Object found in Crkvishte

Fig.25. Dragulevo, jewellery (1-3), coins (4-6)

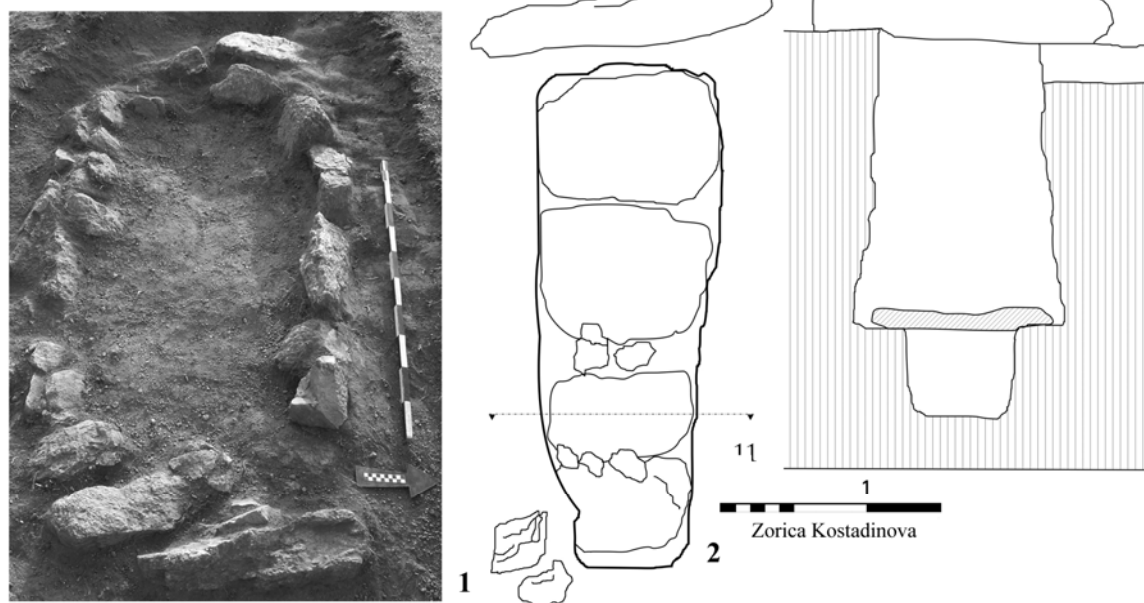


Fig.27. Crveno Pole, necropolis of Spasov Rid, 1. grave 6, 2. grave 4