

EARLY MEDIEVAL BI-RITUAL NECROPOLEIS AT BALCHIK AND TOPOLA (BULGARIA) – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Keywords: *early medieval, bi-ritual necropoleis, Balchik, Topola*

Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to compare the necropoleis at Balchik and Topola that belonged, as the funeral ceremony and the acquired materials evidence, to the pagan period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom and (681–864) existed almost at the same time.*

The researches of the bi-ritual necropoleis which started in the 60s of the last century and are continuing until today, help to clarify a number of issues of the history and culture of the Early Mediaeval Bulgaria. These cemeteries are located mainly in north-eastern Bulgaria and Dobrudzha and provide previously unknown details of the spiritual world and lifestyle of ordinary people, of those Bulgarians who had come with Khan Asparukh and of their direct descendants (*Fig. 1*). Now 37 years after the discovery, the study of the largest bi-ritual necropolis near the village of Topola, Kavarna region, is not yet completed.¹ The excavations in the Balchik necropolis ended in 2008. Significantly is, that both necropoleis were discovered in the same year – 1984. While the necropolis at Balchik was an accidental discovery – during digging works carried out by soldiers from the military airbase, the one near the village of Topola was knowingly sought for years after in the period between 70s and the early 80s of the last century a settlement with interesting dwellings, a huge amount of gray polished pottery and four pottery kilns was partly explored.² As it turned out after its localization, the necropolis was situated 800 m to the south of the settlement and was undoubtedly connected with it.

The aim of this paper is to compare the necropoleis at Balchik and Topola that belonged, as the funeral ceremony and the acquired materials evidence, to the pagan period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom and (681–864) existed almost at the same time. They are situated at a close distance – of only 11 km between them or 5 km in a straight line. The necropolis near Balchik is located underneath the levelled terrain of the plateau to the north of the city; the plateau itself is located 2792 m west from the Black sea coast, c. 170–180 m above the sea level. Since 1941 the terrain of the plateau is a military airport. As pointed out only the occasional digging conducted by the soldiers brought about to its discovery, as the even terrain by no means suggested the existence of a medieval monument. The necropolis in the Kovanlaka locality near Topola is located a little to the northwest, but at almost the same distance – 2800 m from the seacoast on a flat field of black soil arable even today up to 168 m above the sea level. Both necropoleis emerged on Thracian mounds rising over the surroundings. The mounds were in open view in the Middle Ages, and because of that the area around them was chosen for performing the funeral practices. M. Dimitrov, who was the first to explore the necropolis at Balchik found 84 graves.³ During our excavations other 206 graves were un-

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¹ DONCSEVA-PETKOVA-ANGELOVA-YOTOV 1989, 187–197; ANGELOVA-DONCHEVA-PETKOVA-DASKALOV 1997, 141–154.

² BOBCHEVA 1977, 171–176; BOBCHEVA 1981, 198–201.

³ DIMITROV 1989, 231–240; DIMITROV 1991, 87–100.

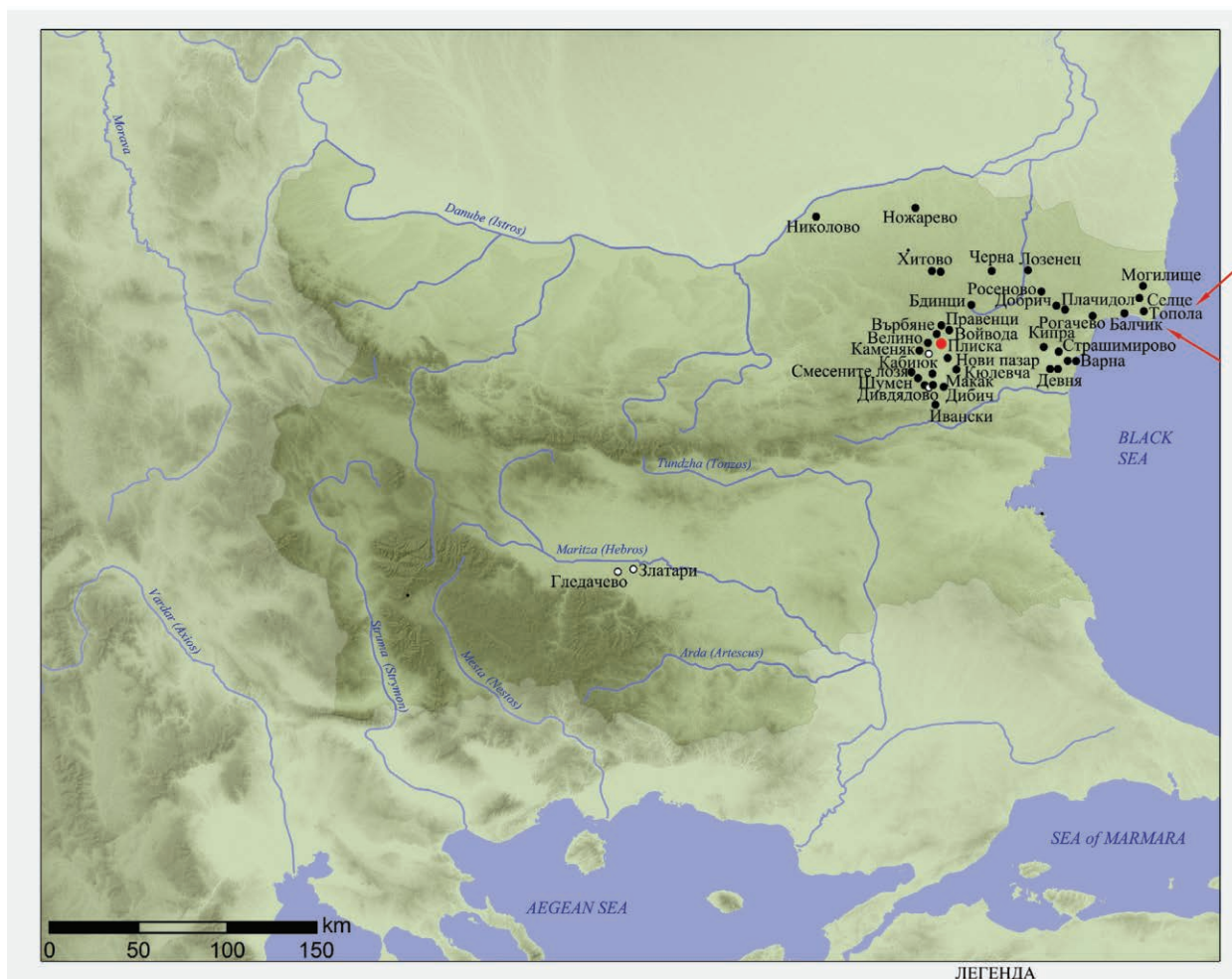


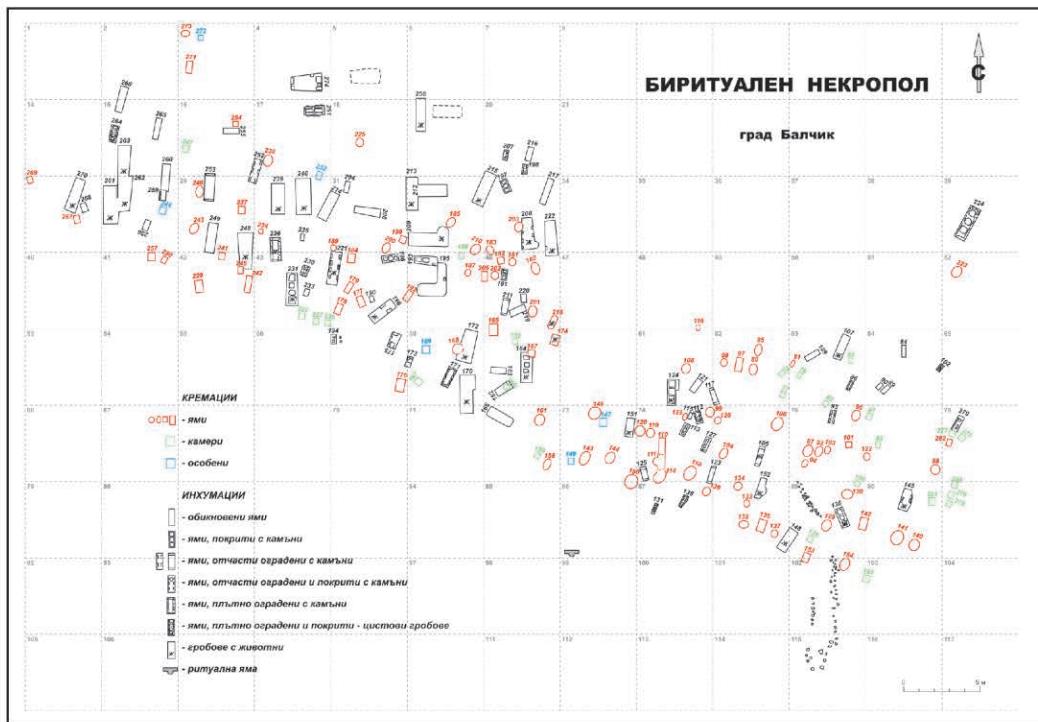
Fig. 1. Map of bi-ritual necropolises
 Рис. 1. Карта биритуальных могильников

covered. Thus their total number reached 290. As to the necropolis at Topola, 625 graves were found there.⁴ Both cemeteries were bi-ritual, i.e. graves with cremation and inhumation were situated on the same area, literally side by side. While in the Balchik necropolis the graves with cremations prevailed (119 with cremation and 87 with inhumation), in the Topola necropolis the number of the graves with cremation was 304, and of those with inhumation 321, i.e. both rites were almost equally practised (Fig. 2). In both cemeteries the cremation was carried out away from the necropolis as the places of the funeral fires were not established.

The graves with cremation in both necropoleis were shallower than those with inhumation. In the

Balchik necropolis the burnt bones were placed mostly in pits (88 pits) of oval, round, rectangular and square shape (Fig. 3). Only in several cases the shape could not be determined because the bones were disposed in piles. Except in pits, in 25 cases the bones were placed in specially constructed stone or stone-brick chambers (cubic or parallelepiped) most of which symbolic, since they had no floor or cover (Fig. 4). Six graves belonged to the so called „specific” graves because each was shaped differently and there were stones in each – slabs or broken stones also arranged in different ways. The cremated bones in the necropolis near Topola were placed in different and more diverse burial repositories. Prevailing were the cremations in pits (usu-

⁴ DONCHEVA-PETKOVA–DASZKALOV–HRISZTOVA 2015, 734–735.



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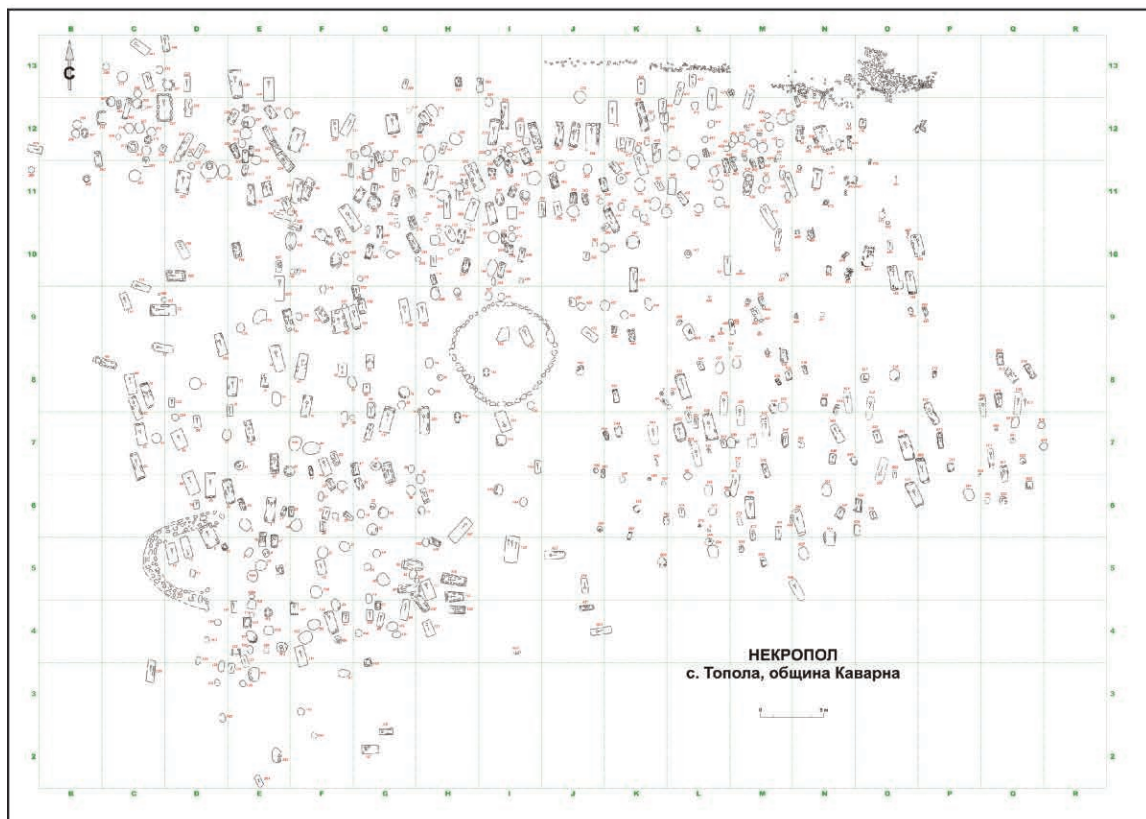


Fig. 2. Plans of the necropoleis. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola

Рис. 2. План могилника. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

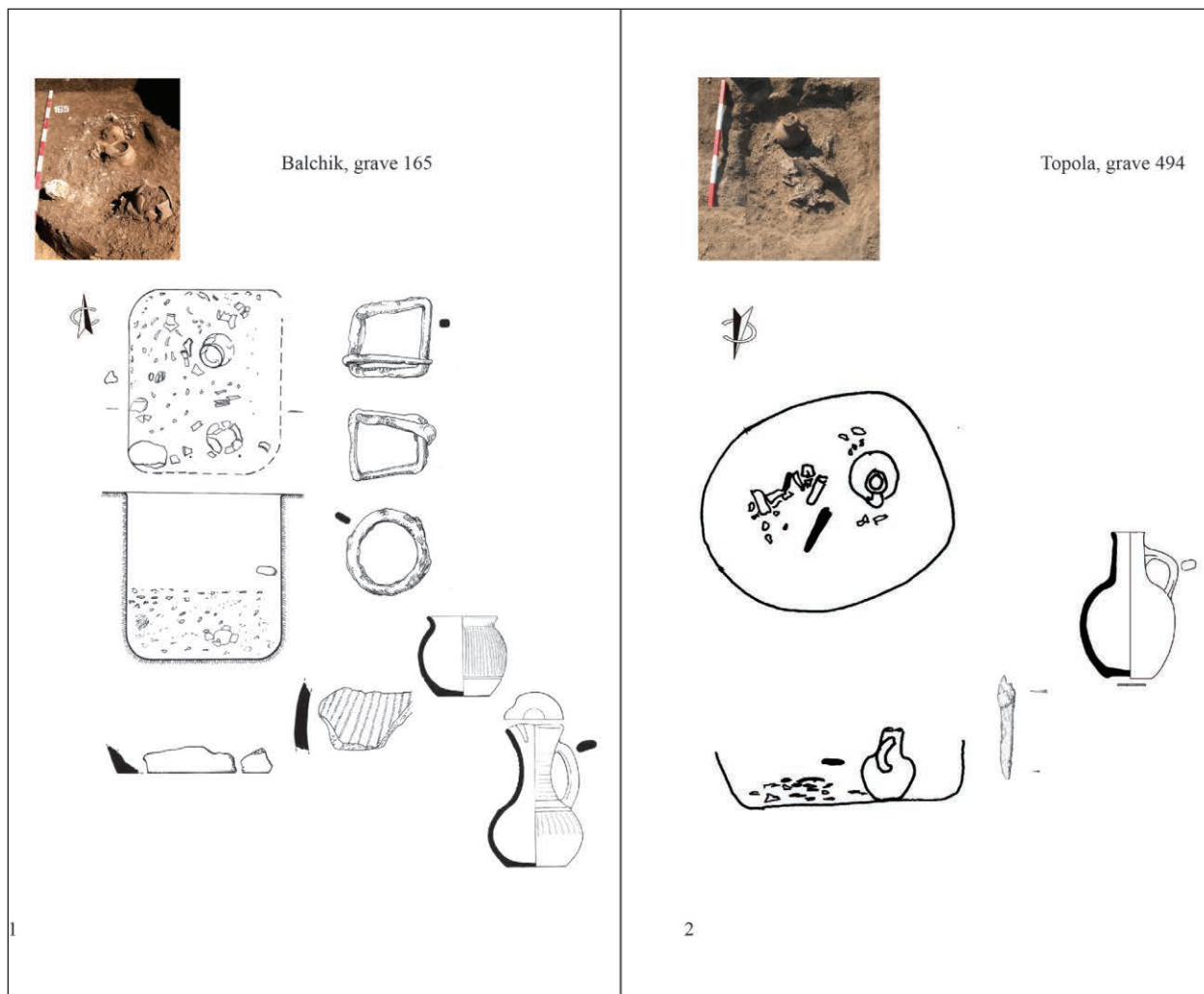


Fig. 3. Cremation in pits. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 3. Погребения с кремацией в ямах. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

ally elliptical), which surpassed the others two-fold. Cremations in chambers also occurred. Almost all were symbolic – „chambers” were built in the pits, with only two parallel walls or in the shape of the letters П and Г. Urns were also found buried in the ground and rarely – placed in chambers (Fig. 5). In isolated cases, the cremated bones were spilled onto stones or bricks.

The graves with inhumation in both necropoleis were identical and distributed into six groups: ordinary pits (Fig. 6), pits covered with stones (Fig. 7), pits partly enclosed with stones (Fig. 8), pits tightly enclosed with stones (Fig. 9), pits partially enclosed and covered with stones (Fig. 10) and cist graves (Fig. 11). But while in the necropolis at Balchik the ordinary pits prevailed (43), in that near Topola most were the graves partially enclosed with stones

(153). Both necropoleis were mainly north-south orientated. In Balchik however the deviations were mostly to the north-east, while in Topola – to the north-west. The graves in both cemeteries were east-west orientated; graves with north-south orientation were rare. In Balchik three graves orientated west-east were pagan, while 21 graves in Topola, with the same orientation, were predominantly Christian. These graves were situated in the western and southern periphery of the necropolis. They lack grave inventory and animal bones but still, some pagan elements of the burial rite could be identified (position of the arms, charcoals thrown, broken vessels).

In both necropoleis children’s graves were many – about half of those interred. Many were the deformed skulls as well. The dead were buried with

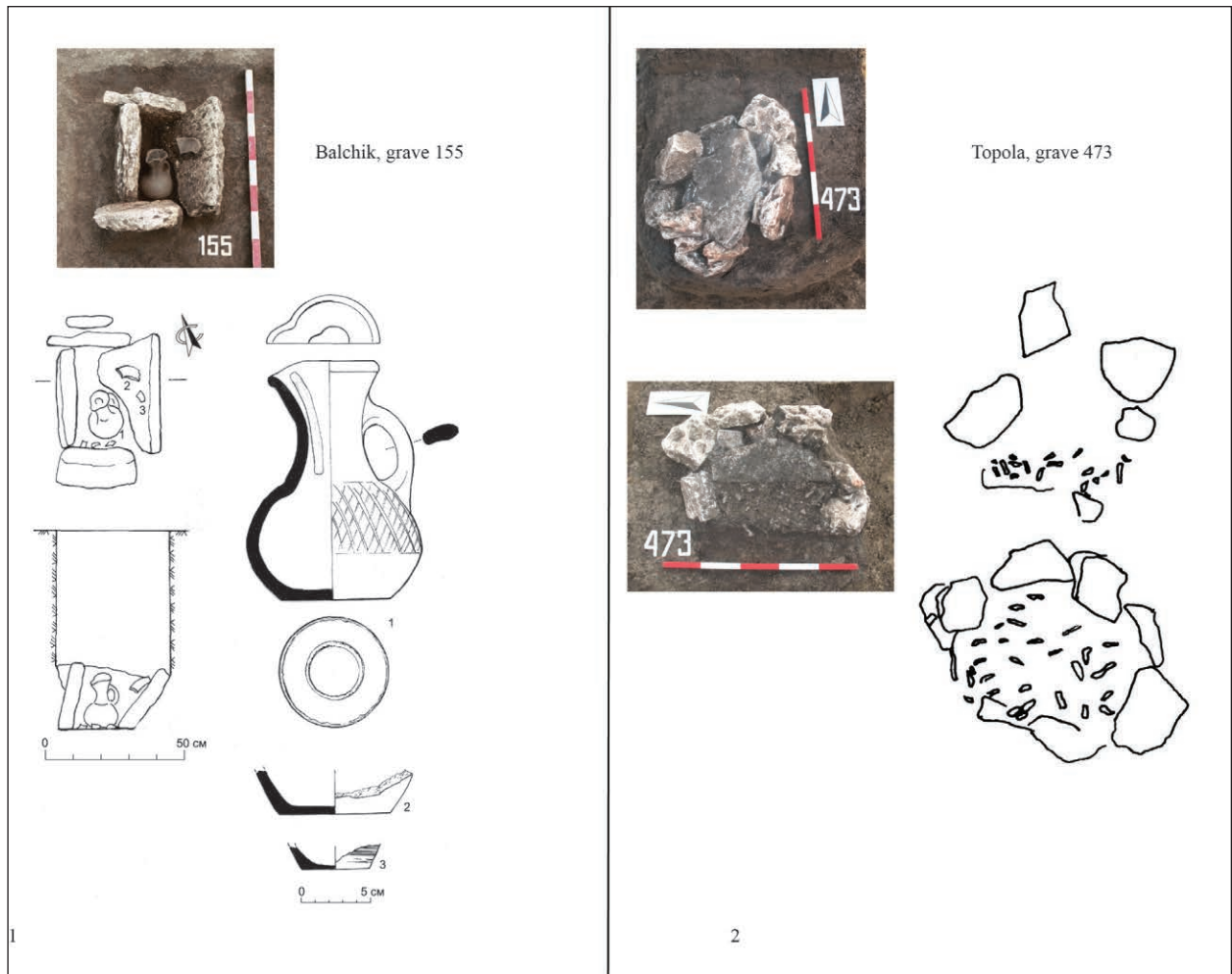


Fig. 4. Cremation in chambers. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 4. Погребения с кремацией в ящике. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

stretched arms and legs, although deviations were also found, mostly in Topola, where more pseudo-hockers were evidenced – of children, adolescents, women and more of men. In Balchik the pseudo-hockers were only four, three of them – were skeletons of women and one of a child, two others were buried with legs bent in the knees. These graves were ordinary pits with no grave goods. In Topola, hockers and pseudo-hockers were found in ordinary pits and in pits covered with stones. Their orientation was often different from the traditional one. The graves with inhumation in both cemeteries were individual. Only in one grave in the necropolis near Balchik two men were buried one upon the other. In Topola, in grave № 135, a man, a woman and an adolescent were buried together in pseudo-hocker position, and in grave № 2 a young man and an elderly woman were asynchronously buried.

Charcoals, rarely lime and small white pebbles were set down in the graves of the two cemeteries for protective reasons. Cases of post-mortem destruction and placing stones onto the dead also occurred.

The archaeological researches of the funeral rites in the two necropoleis indicated that certain rules were observed, they, however, were different. In the necropolis near Balchik, the grave goods, i.e. the vessels were most commonly found in the south-eastern corner of the graves with cremation, while in those with inhumation - various vessels were placed above or on either side of the head and also at the feet. In the necropolis near Topola the vessels occurred in different places in the graves with cremation, often in the centre of the grave. Almost unchanging rule with the inhumations, however, was the pottery vessels, regardless of their type,

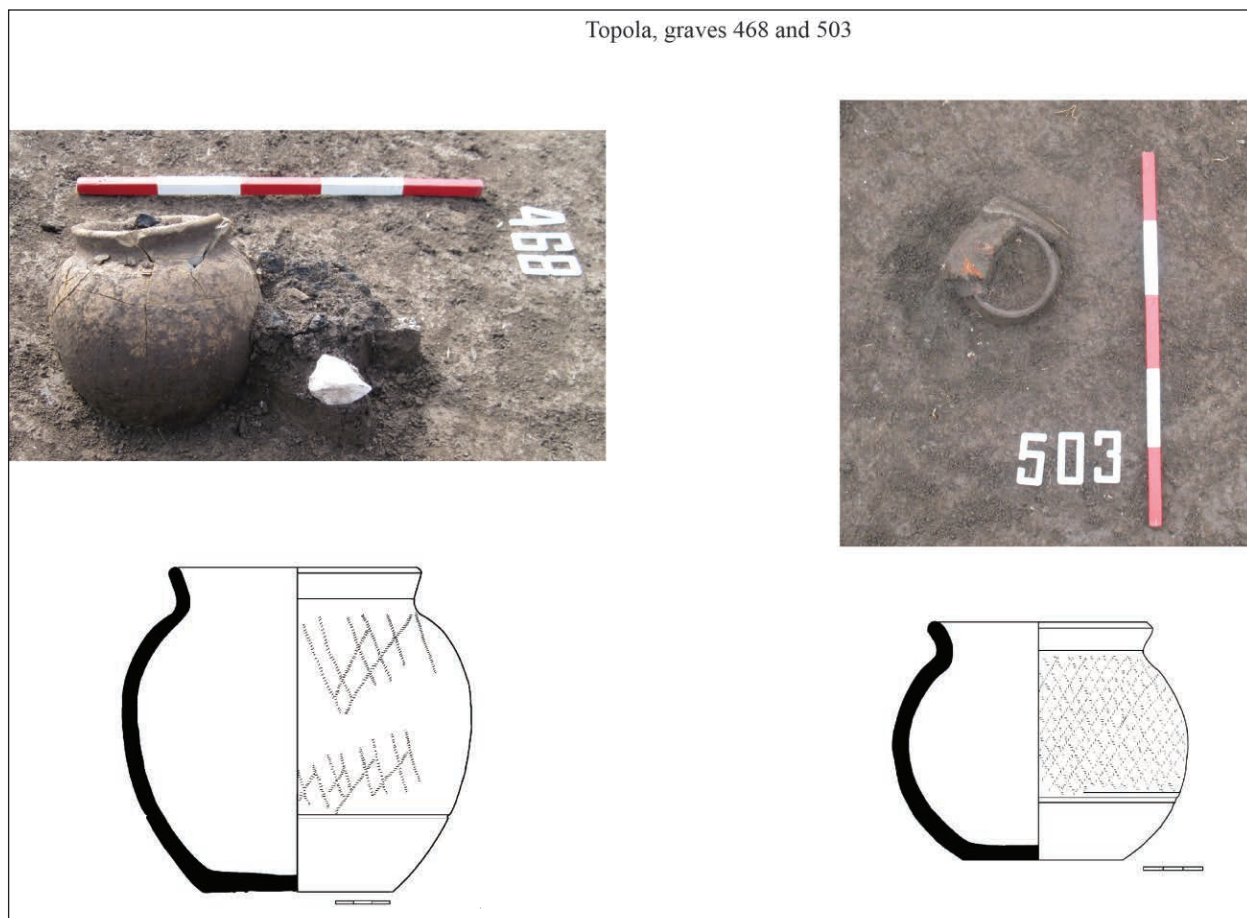


Fig. 5. Cremations in urns: Topola
Рис. 5. Погребения с кремацией в урнах: Топола

to be placed above or on either side of the head; the exceptions were very few. Jugs and amphoroid pitchers occurred only in graves with cremations while in the Balchik necropolis jugs were found in graves with inhumation as well.

In the graves of the two necropoleis both with cremation and inhumation, various domestic animals were left as food for the dead. The Balchik necropolis is the only one of the bi-ritual necropoleis where in the graves with inhumation quite a few skeletons of whole animals were found – in 27 graves. Bones of large animals – e.g. of cattle, were evidenced in 15 graves of men and women and only in one case of a child. The animals were cut into large chunks which were arranged without missing parts thereof, usually in the southern enlarged area of the grave, over the legs. Completely preserved skeletons of sheep and lambs, rarely of poultry, were also found. There were also graves with two animals and parts of a third and poul-

try and sometimes single pieces of meat. In more than half of the graves with cremation there were burnt animal bones and bones with no traces of fire. Whole animals were not found in the graves with cremation, except for one grave – № 150 which contained a headless lamb. In the necropolis at Topola the animals were placed differently. In more than half of the cremations, burnt-out bones and single preserved bones, predominantly of sheep and lambs were found. Less frequently were the entirely preserved skeletons of sheep (№ 39, 247), in one case – of a calf (№ 589), in another – of cattle cut into parts (№ 248). In the inhumations separate pieces of meat were placed particularly often – of sheep, goats, pigs. The graves with whole animals contained predominantly sheep / goats (in 28 graves) and lambs (in eight graves) and only in one case an ox. Sometimes two animals occurred. More often, poultry was placed at the heads. Burnt animal bones were rarely found in the graves with

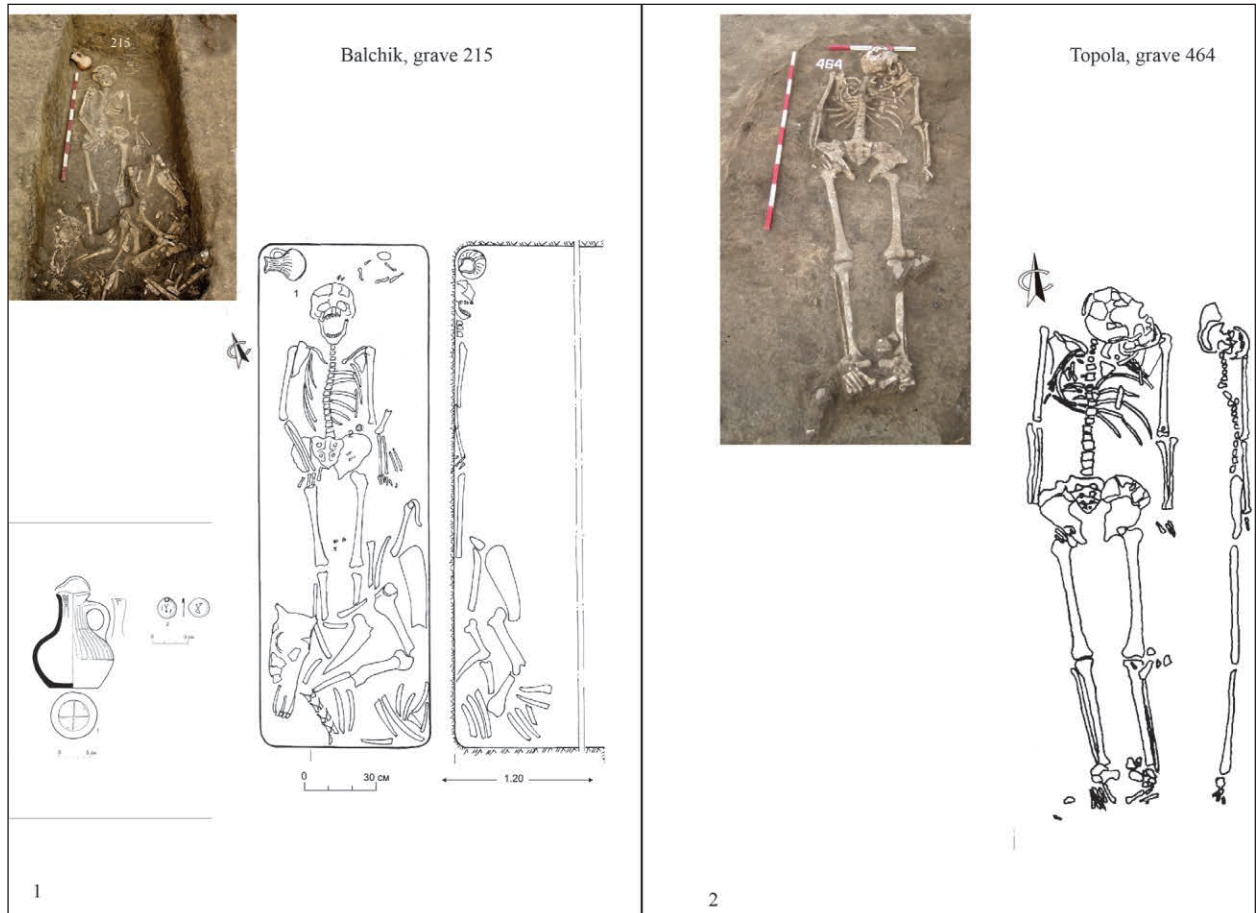


Fig. 6. Inhumation in pits. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 6. Погребения с ингумацией в ямах. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

inhumation. In both cemeteries eggs were placed in dishes or by the buried children.

The grave inventory in the two necropoleis was similar, predominantly consisting of pottery (Figs 12–13, 15). In the necropolis near Topola pottery vessels were found in 333 graves – mostly burial gifts with food and drink and rarely urns. In 203 graves no vessels and fragments were found. Yet, a number of facts indicate that people performing burials in the necropolis at Topola had significant number of pottery. Each of the 63 graves contained two vessels, in other 16 three vessels, in two graves four, but most of them were broken during the burial rituals. Unlike the Balchik cemetery where potsherds (as it seems of pottery broken earlier) prevailed over the graves, in that near Topola whole vessels were broken more than 20 of which we managed to restore. As it appeared defective pottery was placed in the graves as well – most often such that had cracked during the firing, or, albeit rarely – already used in households,

damaged or with missing handles or mouths. As pointed out urn graves were also uncovered in the necropolis near Topola (Fig. 14). Most urns represented large vessels, reaching a height of 28–33 cm. They were made of pure, but most of them were of sandy clay with decoration incised at intervals. The sandy pots were in the shape of an inverted truncated cone and this is the reason those graves to be associated with the Slavs' presence.

There were quite different vessels in the two necropoleis: jugs in Balchik, and spheroidal cups, amphoroid pitchers, and plates in Topola (Fig. 16). The variety of pottery in the necropolis at Topola was much greater. Only in this necropolis, gray high-footed plates were evidenced. There, as in no other necropolis, the plates prevailed (over 80 examples, mostly in graves with inhumation); cups-buckets also occurred, spheroidal cups as in Balchik, plates resembling vessel № 19 of the Nagyszentmiklós treasure. There were more pots

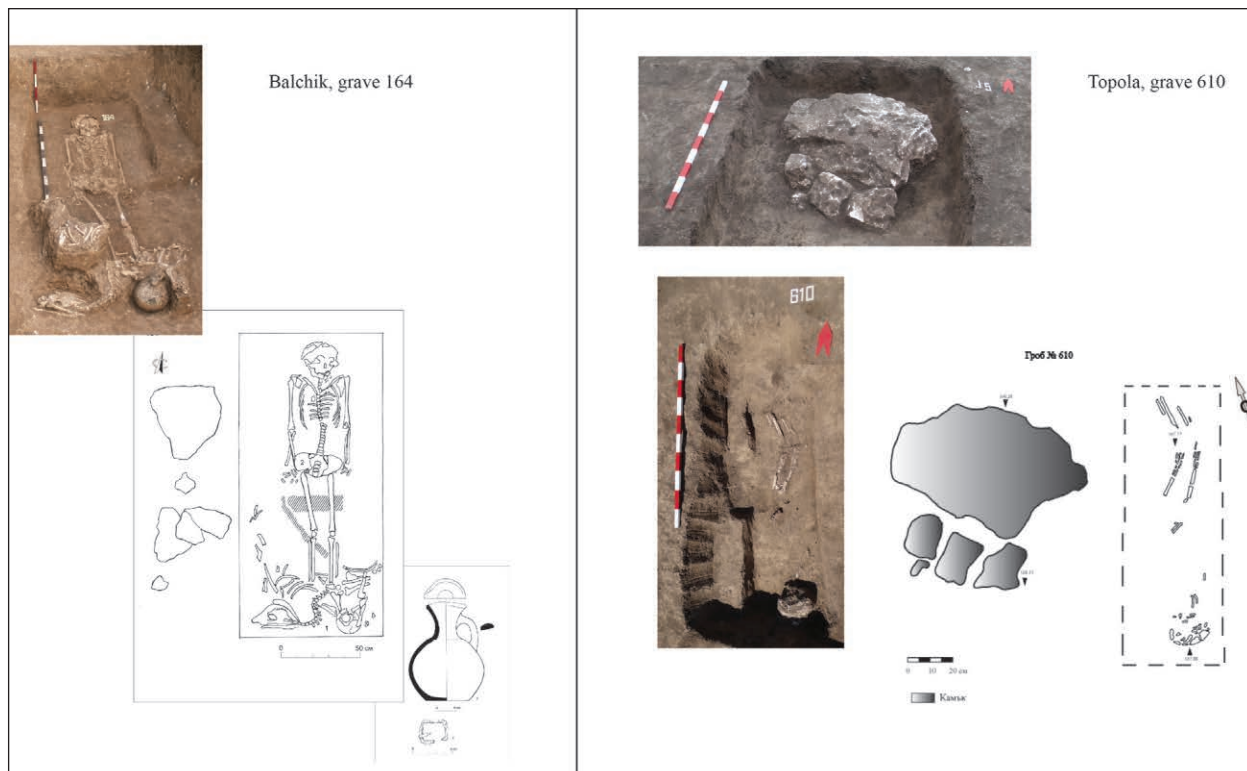


Fig. 7. Inhumation in pits enclosed with stones. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 7. Погребения с ингумацией в ямах, засыпанные камнями. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

with two handles, amphoroid pitchers and vessels – transitional forms between the pots with two handles and amphoroid pitchers. But unlike the necropolis at Balchik, where 53 jugs were found, the jugs at twice the large number of graves in Topola were few (39) and of different types, undoubtedly the work of different artisans and workshops. Besides, in the necropolis at Balchik among the jugs some new types were evidenced, interesting and not known from other places; and some of them with their spheroidal body resembled metal vessels. While in the Balchik necropolis the pots were generally small in size (till 15 cm), with the ones in the Topola necropolis the fluctuations in the heights were very large – from small pots with a height of 5 cm to greater heights up to 33 cm. Small pots were placed primarily in the graves of children, but they were also found in those of grown-ups (№ 92, 109, 322, 419). Fluctuations in size were established with the jugs – their height ranged from 9.8 to 22.5 cm

By the number of pottery vessels found in the graves, the necropolis at Balchik ranks first among the bi-ritual ones. Pottery was found in 134 of the 206 excavated graves which make 65.04%. Most

came from graves with cremations - 85, while in those with inhumation 47 vessels were unearthed. Only eight graves with a different burial rite contained two vessels each and two other three. Taking into account the examples with two and three vessels, the total number of the pottery in the graves was 146. In other six graves there was only one vessel, but another was broken in the ritual within or over the grave.

In the necropolis at Topola there were more adornments – earrings, beads, and mirror (Fig. 17). Several graves contained bone handles, needle cases, astragals, and arrow heads. In four graves in the cemetery at Balchik belt buckles were found that defined its early date. Bent metal plates, probably fittings of wooden vessels were unearthed in both necropoleis.

The research clearly shows that the elements of the proto-Bulgarian rituality identified in other cemeteries as well, were preserved – bi-rituality, shaping the graves, orientation, positions of the interred, animals and containers of food, eggs, broken vessels within and over the grave, charcoal, lime, deformation, pseudo-hockers. Traditions were pre-

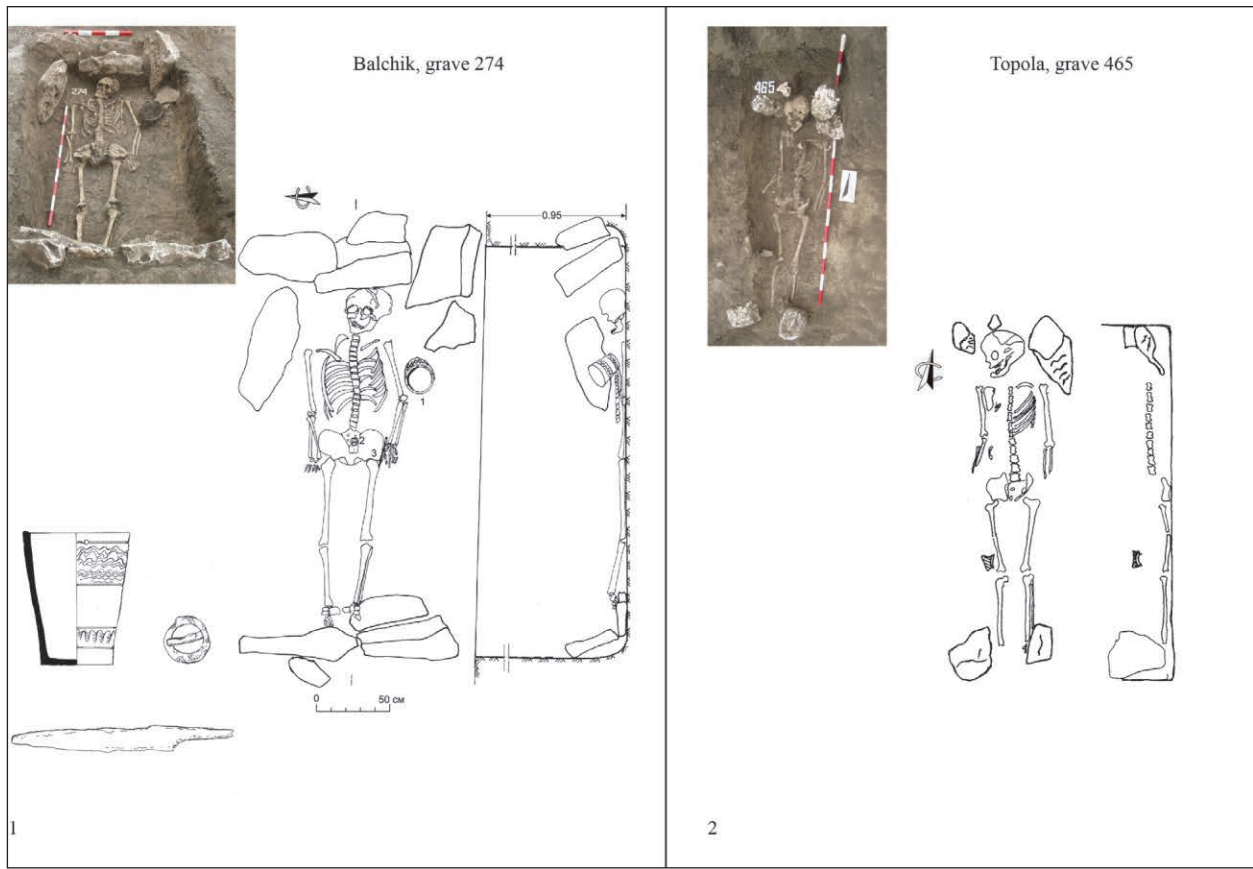


Fig. 8. Pits partially enclosed with stones. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 8. Ямы, частично огороженные камнями. 1. Балчик; 2. Топола

served also in the selection of objects, which accompanied the dead – pottery, modest adornments, knives, buckles, rings, tinderbox, flint, astragals and rarely arrowheads. All that evidenced strong pagan beliefs and remarkable persistence of burial practices whose beginning was long lost in time - persistence that changed in other cemeteries only in the years after the adoption of Christianity.

Unlike most bi-ritual cemeteries, in that at Balchik no graves with cremation occurred where the burnt human bones were placed in urns. This fact, the absence of pots Slavic in form and decoration, the presence of animal bones in most graves with cremations, the same burial goods in the graves of the two groups evidenced that the population they belonged to was proto-Bulgarian.

The spherical, spheroidal and spheroconical jugs, the belt buckles – B-shaped, with cross-like plates, of Corinth or Yassiada types, the thin cop-

per plates with hammered hemispheres, with nails with decorative heads and movable rivets, the folded plates - fittings of wooden vessels, found in the graves of the necropolis at Balchik (Fig. 17), suggest its earlier date which is so debatable in other cemeteries, such as Novi Pazar, Kyulevcha, Topola, Capul Villor-Istria.⁵ The early metal finds evidence that they were not isolated, as was assumed for the buckle from Razdelna and the small cross from Kyulevcha. The metal belt and wooden vessels fittings from the Balchik cemetery are significant datable artefacts that narrow the time range not only of the pottery unearthed in it but also of the necropolis itself. The parallels from the east, mostly from the Cuban-Black Sea region, but also from the Dnieper - in the Pastirskoe Gorodishte site, Crimea, and the Middle Danube - among the monuments of middle Avar, first and second phase of the late Avar period, confirm the earlier date of the necropolis. These ma-

⁵ DONCSEVA-PETKOVA-APOSZTOLOV-RUSZEVA 2016, 131–141.

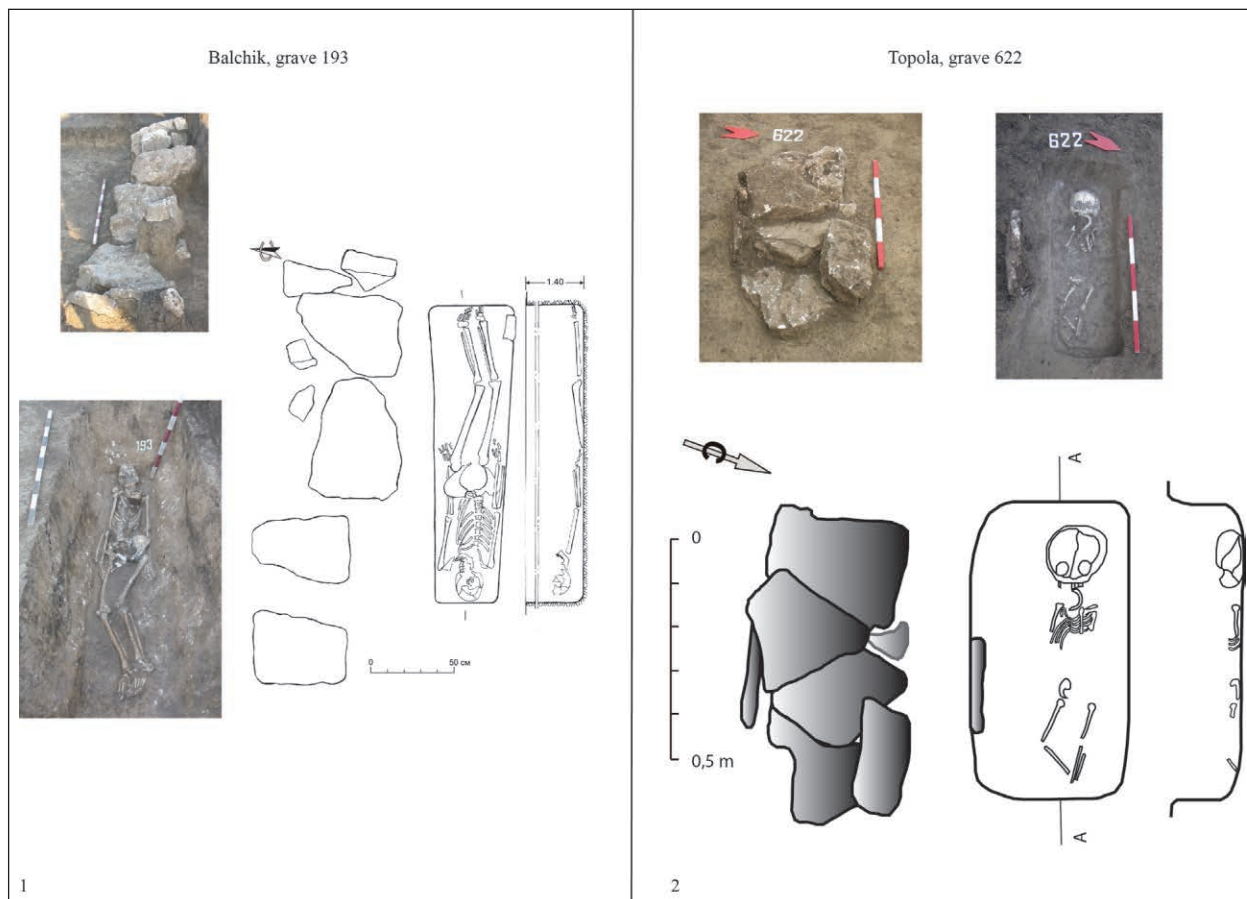


Fig. 9. Pits partially enclosed and covered with stones. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 9. Ямы, частично огороженные и засыпанные камнями. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

terials evidence that it appeared after the Asparukh Bulgarians crossed to the south of the Danube and the emergence of the Bulgarian Khanate (about the 80s – the end of the 7th century). It is not quite clear when it was abandoned. The large number of graves indicates that it was not created in a short period – but perhaps in a little more than a century. There were no Christian graves, no amphoroid pitchers except for a large atypical vessel and all this shows that it was abandoned around the end of the 8th century and hardly survived to the 9th century.

What events might have caused the end of the settlement, and hence of the necropolis, is difficult to determine. It is known that in the greater part of the second half of the 8th century until his death the Byzantine Emperor Constantine V Copronymos (741–775) made numerous attempts to „get rid of

the peace treaty with the Bulgarians signed in 716 and inflict a crushing blow on the Bulgarian state”. Whether the settlement at the present town of Balchik with the nearby seaport was devastated in some of these marches is difficult to say, especially since most maritime campaigns of Emperor Constantine V ended with failure due to shipwrecks, and since they were directed to the mouth area of the Danube.⁶

The second half of the 8th century was saturated with domestic political events, crisis in power and changing of Khans. Besides, the „famine years” caused by the severe cold in 763–764 led to the extinction of people, livestock and frost of crops. Those years were followed by unprecedented drought in 764. Diseases such as the plague between 746 and 749 that transferred from Asia Minor to the Balkans also had its devastating share.⁷ It is very likely some

⁶ BOZSILOV–GJUZELEEV 1999, 115, 117–118.

⁷ BOZSILOV–GJUZELEEV 1999, 113–117.

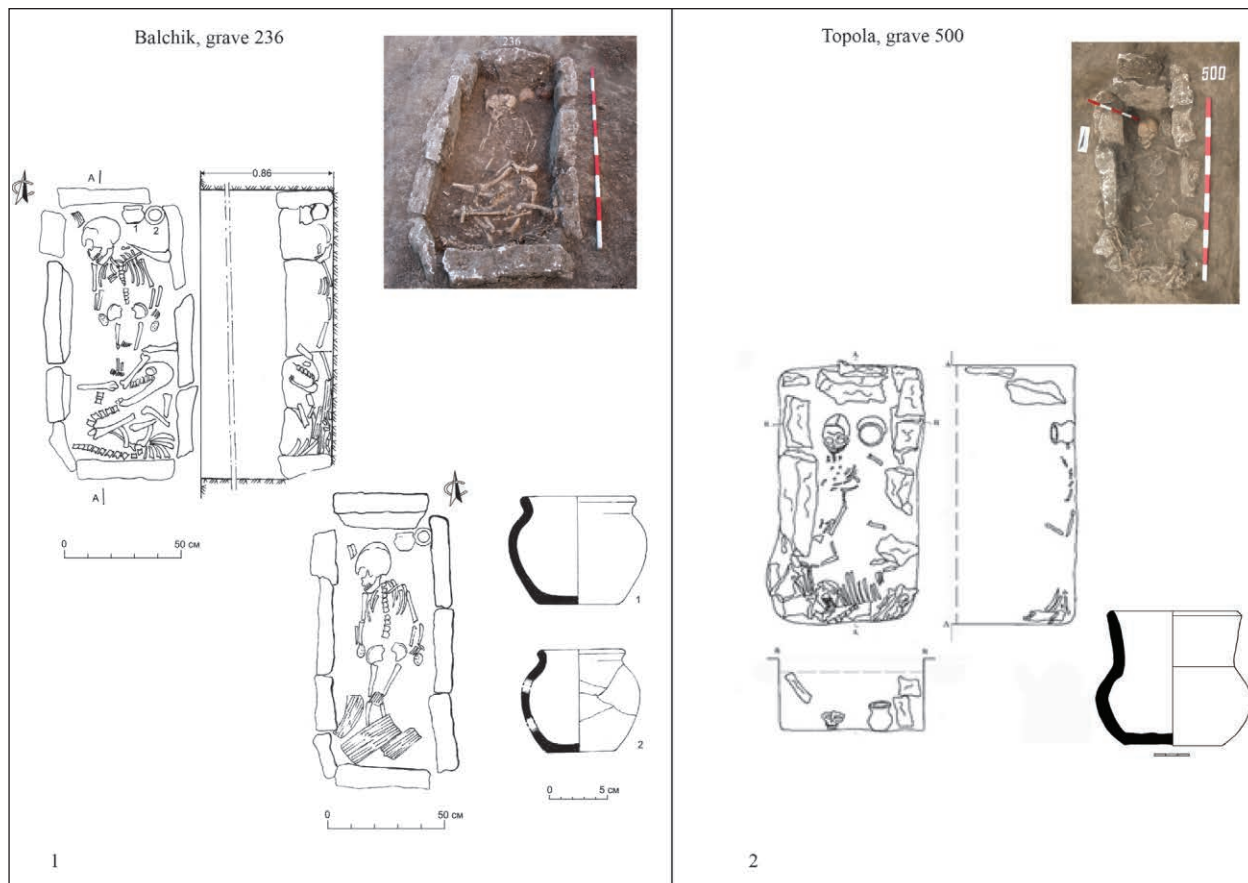


Fig. 10. Pits tightly enclosed with stones. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 10. Ямы, полностью окруженные камнями. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

of these events to have caused the destruction of the settlement and hence the end of the necropolis.

The settlement is not yet precisely localized, but the considered metal objects and pottery vessels help to present the image of a cemetery that belonged to the residents of a medieval settlement. These finds allow assuming that not far from the beach – on the plateau above the present town of Balchik – in the 80s of the 7th century a Bulgarian population settled, that brought important datable objects and left the earliest of the bi-ritual cemeteries known so far. Thus the presented monument is one of the few archaeological evidence to support the information derived from the written sources on the beginning of the Bulgarian state.

In the necropolis at Topola no such early belt buckles occurred as was the case at Balchik, but

in two graves folded copper plates with rivets of semi-spherical heads were found, probably fittings of wooden vessels that are indicative of its early date. In the graves with cremation and inhumation sphericoconical cups were placed, imitating the gold and silver metal vessels like those of the Peshchepina treasure, the Kunbábony, Kunágota, Kiskörös-Vágóhíd, and Budapest-Rákos in the Avar Khanate⁸ or repeating images from the Tokharistan mural in Balalik Tepe (Central Asia) where a ceramic cup was found in one of the rooms.⁹ These are early shapes that determine the date of the necropolis soon after the formation of the Bulgarian state, when the population already settled; the potters mastered the clay deposits and were able to produce them. The plate from grave № 486 also repeats metal models. Similar is the shape of the Sassanian

⁸ GARAM 2002, Abb. 14.

⁹ HRISZTOVA 2010, 530, tabl. I. 3.

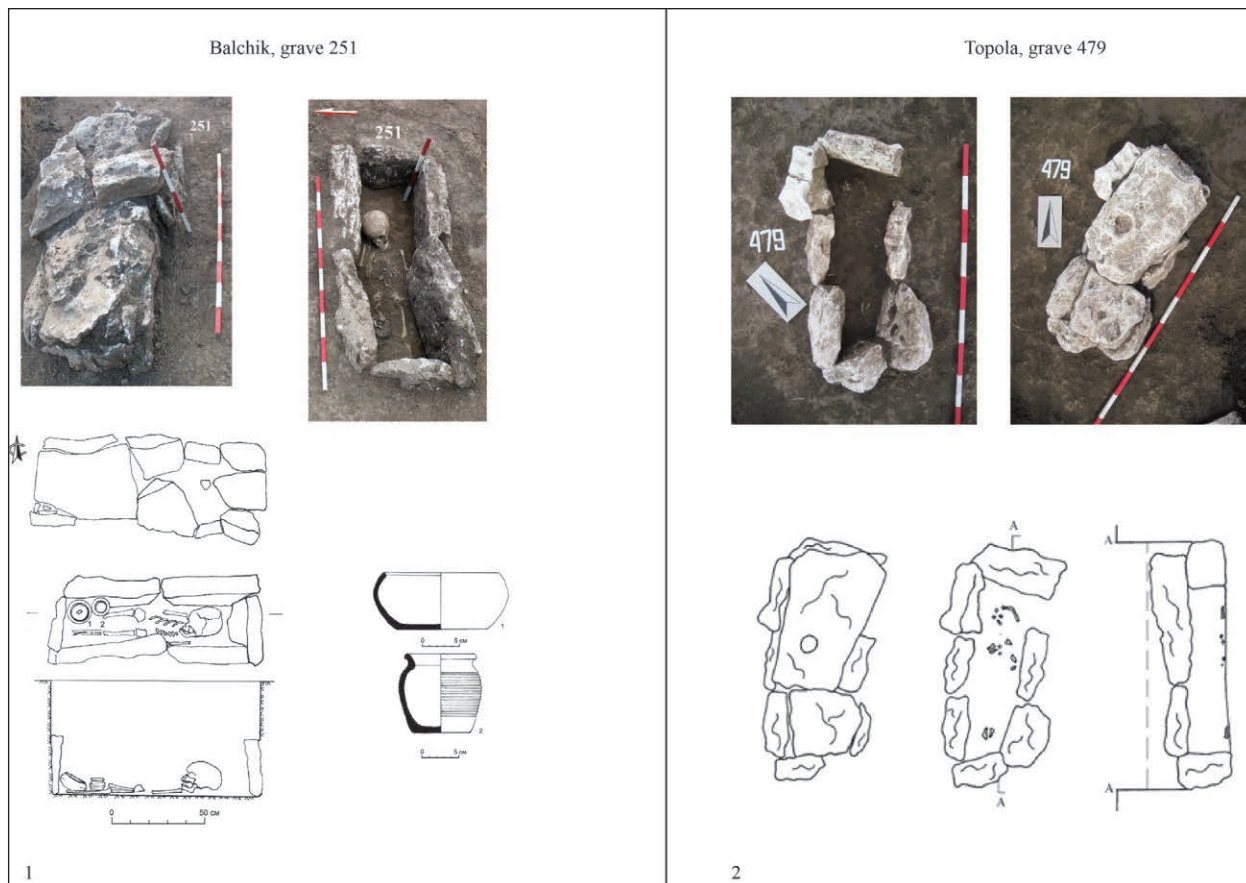


Fig. 11. Pits tightly enclosed and covered with stones – Cist graves. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 11. Ямы, полностью огороженные и засыпанные камнями. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

bowl, as it is called by J. Werner, from the Pereshchepina treasure¹⁰ and grave № 244 from the necropolis of Zamárdi.¹¹ The plate from grave № 56 has a wider rounded body and higher stem and is associated with certain metal models – with the early Byzantine vessels from Várpalota-Gymnasium in Hungary, Nocera Umbra in Italy,¹² with the silver bucket from the Vrap treasure, Albania,¹³ but several plates (bowls) of pure clay with smooth walls or stamped circlets resemble in shape vessel № 19 of the Nagyszentmiklós treasure. In grave № 467 of the necropolis, in 2010 we found the earliest coin in the bi-ritual cemeteries – an Arabic dirham minted in Merv in 81 AH (27.02.700–14.02.701 AD) after the reform of the Omayyads. This dirham should prob-

ably be connected with Khan Tervel who came to the aid of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III against the Arabs in 717–718.¹⁴ In another grave (№ 382) again with cremation a small Byzantine white clay pitcher was found as well as an interesting bridle, which is defined as Arab. So the archaeological discoveries are associated with the richer information from the historical sources and evidence that the inhabitants of the medieval settlement at the present-day village of Topola participated in the attacks against the Arabs that had besieged the Byzantine capital. In the necropolis at Topola other metal objects also occurred – a lead silvered mirror, a variety of earrings, including examples decorated with hollow spheres, appliqué, ornamented bone handles and needle cas-

¹⁰ VERNER 1988, app. 10. 22.

¹¹ GARAM 2001, 174, Taf. 131. 2; BÁRDOS–GARAM 2009, 43, 244, Taf. 236. 1, Taf. 260. 1.

¹² GARAM 2001, 173–174, Taf. 131. 1, Taf. XL. 1; VIDA 2002, 116, Abb. 4.

¹³ WERNER 1989, 14, Taf. 10.

¹⁴ DONCHEVA-PETKOVA 2014, 121–126.



Fig. 12. Pots of sandy clay. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 12. Горшки из песчаной глины. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола



Fig. 13. Pots of pure clay. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 13. Горшки из чистой глины. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола



Fig. 14. Pots-urns from the necropolis at Topola
Рис. 14. Горшки - урны с некрополя – Топола



Fig. 15. Similar-in-shape vessels from the two necropoleis. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
Рис. 15. Сосуды аналогичной формы с двух некрополей. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола



Fig. 16. Vessels of different shape from the two necropoleis. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 16. Сосуды разной формы с двух некрополей. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола



Fig. 17. Some datable finds. 1: Balchik; 2: Topola
 Рис. 17. Предметы, имеющие хронологическое значение. 1: Балчик; 2: Топола

es. Much more than those in the necropolis at Balchik were the glass beads. The number of the graves in superposition was also greater in that necropolis. The amphoroid pitchers were not few. These facts and the Christian graves indicate that the necropolis at Topola existed for a longer period and survived up to the 60-70s of the 9th century. Greater was the number of the graves in the northern part of the necropolis, which was closest to the settlement. This was probably the place of the first graves, as well as of the graves from the early 8th century – those containing the mirror, the elliptical plate with a beautiful vegetal ornament, the bridle, the Arab dirham, spheroidal cups. The greatest number of overlapping graves was again in that area.

By a number of elements in the ritual practice, the necropoleis at Balchik and Topola correspond with the other bi-ritual necropolis to the south of the Lower Danube – burial structures, north-south orientation, laying the dead with stretched arms and legs, and in a few cases in different positions, the presence of pseudo-hockers, placing animal in the graves, by the skull deformation, the two major pottery groups and the burial inventory found in the graves. These are elements that speak of long-established traditions that were brought instead of created after the settlement. The presence of permanent cemeteries is an evidence that the population that left them was not only stock

breeding, but also settled, agricultural, with habits in their everyday life and culture, probably influenced mainly by the descendants of Sarmatians, of Alani or by local Caucasian population and most probably established back there – in the Kuban steppe, the Northeast Black Sea region (Northwest Caucasus), the Azov region, of which Y. Fedorov and G. Fedorov write and the Syrian author Zacharias Rhetor testifies.¹⁵

The recurring elements in the ritual are irrefutable evidence of the greater ethnic and cultural unity of the population that has left the bi-ritual cemeteries. Such diversity in rites, burial structures, orientations and inventory as are characteristic of the East European steppes are established on the Lower Danube although the proto-Bulgarians are supposed to have been composed of different ethnic components.

The study of the necropoleis at Balchik and Topola and their comparison with similar cemeteries, graves and materials show that a large part of the population that crossed over the Danube about 680 settled in the present day Dobrich region. The cemeteries at Balchik and Topola are not the only explored cemeteries. Pottery finds, separate graves and several partially explored necropoleis have been reported. They all show that Northeast Bulgaria and Dobrudzha were the main areas in which the Bulgarian Khanate was formed.

¹⁵ FEDOROV–FEDOROV 1978, 5, 66.

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РАННЕСРЕДНЕВЕКОВЫЕ БИРИТУАЛЬНЫЕ НЕКРОПОЛИ В БОЛГАРИИ (БАЛЧИК И ТОПОЛА) – СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Исследования биритуальных некрополей, начатые в 60-ых годах прошлого столетия и продолжающиеся до сегодняшних дней, помогли разъяснению ряда вопросов, связанных с историей и культурой раннего средневековья в Болгарии. Эти некрополи находятся в основном в Северо-восточной Болгарии и в Добрудже, и раскрывают неизвестные до сих пор данные о духовном мире и о быте обыкновенного населения, пришедших протоболгар с ханом Аспарухом и их прямых потомков. Их насчитывают более 30, но большинство из них еще не полностью исследовано. Уже в течении 32 лет после открытия, изучение самого крупного биритуального некрополя возле Топола-Каварненско – ещё не закончено. Раскопки некрополя в Балчике закончились в 2008 году. Нашей целью является сопоставление некрополей возле Балчика и Топола, которые, как показывает погребальный обряд и найденные материалы, берут своё начало от языческого периода Первого болгарского царства и существовали почти в одно и тоже время. Оба некрополя расположены в близости – на расстоянии всего в 11 км или 5 км по прямой линии, не далеко от Черного моря. В обоих некрополях наблюдается много сходств, но также и различий. Здесь мы рассматриваем и сравниваем их разнообразные могилы с кремацией и ингумацией, положение мертвых, наличие псевдохокеров, деформированные черепы, ориентации, инвентар – гробниц с преобладающими гончарными изделиями (сосуды из песчаной и чистой глины), металлические находки, разнообразный домашний скот. Аналогии на востоке, в основном в области Кубани и Черного моря, но также и на Днестре – в Пастирском поселении, в Крыму, как и среди аварских некрополей, являются доказательством ранней даты возникновения некрополи. Эти материалы показывают, что они возникли при движении на юг по Дунаю Аспаруховых болгар, с возникновением Болгарского ханства /около 80-ых годов – в конце VII века. Некрополь в Балчике существовал на протяжении всего VIII века и едва ли достигает IX века. Некрополь возле Топола существовал гораздо дольше и достиг 60-х и 70-х годов IX века.