ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCHES REGARDING THE ROMAN – BYZANTINE PROVINCE, SCYTHIA

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The anthropological studies regarding to the Roman – Byzantine province, Scythia, has an important value for the historical consideration about the funeral discoveries. Despite the large numbers of skeletons discovered during the archaeological excavations, anthropological analyses have not covered all these. Most of them are analyses of the osteological material, such as sex determination, age estimation, stature and some data about paleopathology. The important questions for this period are the artificial deformed skull in many necropolises, the bones of Christian martyrs and the link between historical sources and anthropological results, the human remains from upper levels of living, and different discussions about the previous analyses. These short considerations have the goal to show stage of anthropological studies about Scythia province.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to make a short presentation of the anthropological analysis regarding the human remains from the Roman–Byzantine period and to discuss some of their problems.

From the chronological point of view, province of Scythia was established after 293 A.D. due to the administrative reforms of emperor Diocletianus and it is considered that the province had existed until 641 A.D. (Rădulescu 2001: 467 and 483). The geographical limits of the province are: the Danube on the West and North side, the Black Sea at East side, Moesia Secunda province in the South (Rădulescu 2001: 468 – 469, fig. 54).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the funeral discoveries from Scythia during the Roman – Byzantine period is not complete without the discussion of the anthropological analysis. In the below table there are 2660 individuals from 2839 known graves and 166 skeletons with anthropological analysis.
Their percentage is not important, but there are some problems which have to be explained:
- Anthropological analysis of the human remains from the necropolis of Carsium;
- The presence of an artificial deformed skull in the necropolises from Berroe, Callatis, Histria, Ibida, Tomis and martyrs crypt from Tropaeum Traiani;
- The existence of Alans at Histria;
- Human bones from the upper level from Halmyris, Ibida and Tropaeum Traiani;
- Christian martyrs from Halmyris, Noviodunum and Tropaeum Traiani.

The number of analyzed skeletons with the number of individuals and discovered graves in each site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>No. of graves</th>
<th>No. of individuals</th>
<th>No. of analyzed skeletons</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argamum</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Mirițoiu 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berroe</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>1113</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mirițoiu 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callatis</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mirițoiu 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capidava</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nicolaescu – Plopșor &amp; Ceacalopol 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carsium</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinogetia</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Popovici &amp; Adam 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enisala</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halmyris</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mirițoiu &amp; Soficaru 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Histria</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Nicolaescu – Plopșor 1969; Mirițoiu 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibida</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Mirițoiu &amp; Soficaru 2003; Soficaru &amp; alli 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noviodunum</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietreni</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sipote</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomis</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulmetum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2839</td>
<td>2660</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anthropological analysis of some skeletons from Carsium. During the winter of 1987 – 1988 in necropolis of Crasium saving archaeological excavations were made and the human remains were analyzed by Alexandra Bolomey. Unfortunately, the results have never been published and there is just a short note in an archaeological article. Among different information it specifies: “in some situations the skulls present deformations of maxillary bones, what suggests a link with the population from northern Africa (Nicolae 1993: 222). In the anthropological literature (Dembo & Imbelloni 1938) there is no any specification about such cases in the world. The only explanation is confusion from the archaeologist. We think that may be the author of anthropological analysis sustain the presence of some artificial deformed skulls (this hypothesis is not available because the bones are in our custody and we have not found such a case) or most probably, she observed skulls with maxillary pathology.

Artificial deformed skulls. The presence of a deformed skull among the funeral discoveries during this period indicates the existence of a population from the northern Black Sea or pure and simple the maintaining of nomadic customs. In a recent study, N. Mirițoiu demonstrated that artificial deformation of skull was a habit just of the nomadic population such as: Sarmatians, Huns, Ostrogoths, Gepids, and Protobulgarians. At least the skull (Mirițoiu 2006: 156), which belonged to the one of the five martyrs discovered in the Simple Basilica, was found in the graves of necropolises from Berro (15 skulls, Mirițoiu 2006: 170–186), Callatis (11 skulls, Mirițoiu 2006: 216–231), Histria (6 skulls, Mirițoiu 2006: 192–20), Ibida (4 skulls plus other 2 discovered during the last year, Mirițoiu 2006: 257–260) and Tomis (6 skulls, Mirițoiu 2006: 166–167). The graves had not something different from the others and their integration in the local community could be suppose. From the ethnical point of view it is very difficult to say which population they belong, to but it is certain of nomadic origin (Mirițoiu 2006: 153).

Between the end of the IIIrd century and the beginning of the VIIth century A.D., Scythia province was affected by the attacks and invasions of Goths, Huns, Alans, Avars, and Protobulgarians, and we could presume an establishment and integration of them in the local communities.

“Alans” at Histria. The idea of a community of Alans buried in the area of Extra – muros Basilica from Histria was sustained first anthropologically (Nicolaescu – Plopșor 1969: 17–24) and second archaeologically (Nubar 1971: 210–212). We will discuss below the anthropological method used but first we have to analyze the archaeological conclusion of this problem. It was sustained about the position of skeletons (flexed, semi-flexed with the legs across or with the upper limbs upright and flexed) could have analogies in the Sarmatic necropolises from the Romanian or ex – Soviet Union territory (Nubar 1971: 211). In the anthropological literature the discovered position of a skeleton is not the same with which had been deposed because the skeleton has some “movement” (Byers 2005: 107–110; Crubézy 2000: 16–31). Due to this reason we cannot sustain this idea,
with 11 skeletons which have a different position from the others 74. The across position of the legs at the tibia level could be explained by the transportation of the body to the grave or during the deposition. Regarding the burial artifacts, and the presence of shells and coral pearls (Nubar 1971: 211) could be explained by the access to a harbor and the opportunity to make commerce with other regions.

Regarding the method of anthropological analysis the method of craniological analysis of the phenotypic structural groups was used (Nicolaescu – Ploșor 1969: 18), which is based more on the facial skeleton and which was available at that time. The analogies are made with two necropilises assigned to Alans from the ex – Soviet Union territory and dated in the XIth – XIIIth centuries A.D. (Nicolaescu – Ploșor 1969: 21). We shall not discuss the methodology and we will present only another study that invalidates this hypothesis.

It is about a comparative statistical analysis based on 10 cranial measurements and by the Penrose distances, calculated were using 76 craniological series from Europe, North Africa and Central Asia, which covered a period of 500 years (1–500 A.D.) (Schwietzky & Rössing 1975: 193). Based on this statistical method, a dendogramme with 61 significant series was obtained. Among the compared series it was the cranial sample from Histria – basilica extra muros; this, according to the results from the dendogramme, belongs to the southern cluster and it is nearby the samples from Greece, Pompei (Italy) and Ampurias (Spain) (Schwietzky & Rössing 1975: 202). The southern group is well established and it has craniological series from Romania, Anatolia, Egypt, southern Italy and north-east of Spain (Schwietzky & Rössing 1975: 206, fig. 3). Based on this method, much different from the other one used by the Romanian researcher, we could conclude about the people buried at Histria – basilica extra muros, they do belong to a population from northern Black Sea but they rather belong to a local population mostly to the Greek inhabitants of the city wall. The wish to establish the ethnic based on the anthropological analyses has conducted to mistakes, and much more the social relationships were ignored. For example, how a foreign population might have lived in Histria and how they could be buried in the same necropolis?

**Human bones from the living upper level**

**Halmyris:**
- Murighiol 1997, Therm I = cranial vault (40 %), left zygomatic, maxilla with 7 teeth; male, 35–40 years old;
- Murighiol 2002, T 3, Praesb. = 3 fragments (one from the occipital and other two from the right parietal bone) of the cranial vault (20%); male, over 50 years old.

Analogies in the same site were discovered in 2002 (Mirițoiu & Soficaru 2003: 540–543); all these bones could belong to other burials.

**Ibida:**
- Casa Mihailov = cranial vault (20%), inferior half of left femur; male, 45 years old; it is possible to be a destroyed grave;
– Baza 3 = human sacrum, possibly from a female.

Tropaeum Traiani:
– building D, a human skull from a 30–35 years old male (Soficaru 2005: 3–6);
– nearby basilica B, a human skull from a young female and other skull fragments from a teenager (Soficaru 2006).

Martyrs
Halmyris:
– 2 skeletons assigned to the martyrs Epictet and Astion; anthropological analysis confirmed the historical sources concerning the age, perimortem trauma and cause of death (Miriţoiu & Soficaru 2003: 543–545).

Noviodunum:
– 4 skeletons, males, there is not an anthropological analysis, but we know their names due to the Greek inscriptions on the crypt (Miriţoiu & Nicolaescu – Ploşor 1978: 203–204).

Tropaeum Traiani:

CONCLUSIONS

The small number of the individuals with anthropological analysis in comparison with the large number of discovered burials does not diminish the importance of these studies. Since it is a period with social transformations, religious, ethnic and linguistic, the anthropological analyses could offer different answers about the province’ population. Also, the funeral practices might be explained with the help of anthropological analyses.

REFERENCES


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