

## Sacrifice – Crime or Burial Ritual. Pits with Human Remains. Recent Field Investigations

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Many archaeological complexes present human bones in context, which to some point contradicts known outlines of the burial ritual for the investigated period. New investigations on the construction site of the Hemus highway, namely Site 6, pit N 69 and site 7, pits N 1 – square 110/20 and N 1 – square 185/5 present new similar finds in the area of the present north-east Bulgaria. Here in complex of pits, as characteristic for Iron Age are found human skeletons of four individuals.

*Key words:* Iron Age pit complex, human remains.

### Materials and Methods

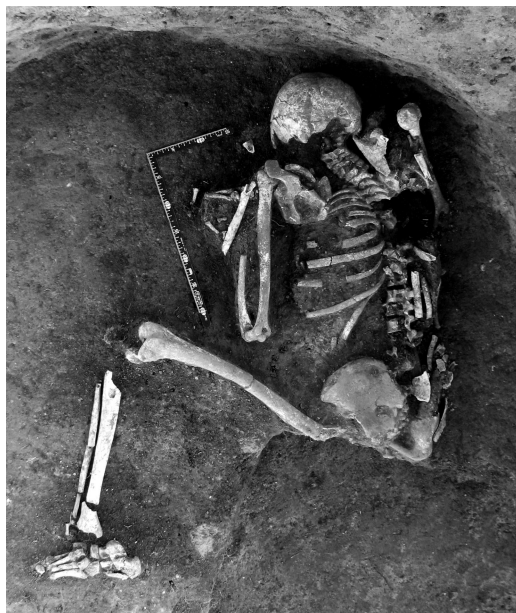
The site is situated by the quarter of Makak, Shumen district. During the excavations of the Iron Age pits two of them, both numbered as N 1, square 110/10 and N 1, square 185/5, presented human remains [10]. Present investigation is held in two stages. First, field one, aims strict registration of the situation of found human remains, stressing on the anatomical position and completeness of skeletons. The second laboratory, stage, aims anthropological identification of individuals, presented in excavated skeletal material. In the anthropological identification of age and sex of individuals are used following methods: epiphyseal fusion and pubic symphyseal surface relief after Todd [5], cranial sutures obliteration [9, 7]; complex of sexual dimorphism on pelvic and cranial bones [1, 7, 5], standard tables for diameters of femoral, humeral and radial heads, femoral and humeral bicondylar breadth and clavicle length [2, 3, 8].

### Results

In the pit N 1, square 110/10 is registered a relatively well preserved human skeleton (**Fig. 1**). Here the skeleton is at a very unusual and unnatural position. It is relatively well preserved with some missing bones from feet and hands, explainable with the natural decomposition and taphonomic factors, which acted after the deposition of the body. Long



**Fig. 1.** Position of human remains in the pit N 1, square 185/5



**Fig. 2.** Position of human remains in the pit N 1, square 110/10

bones of limbs, vertebral column and the skull are relatively well preserved and they are found in situ in articulation in joints. The skeleton shows a strong twist of the body in deposition in the pit or, while the bones of pelvic girdle, lumbar vertebrae and lower thoracic vertebrae lie on their back (posterior sides) after rotation in the vertebral column, the bones of pectoral girdle show position of the body in that area at its left side, or lying on the bones of the left scapula and left humerus, the right humerus and right scapula covering the bones of thoracic cage. Cervical vertebrae and the skull lie on their left sides. The mandible is found in articulation with the skull. Right humerus, radius and ulna are placed with strong flexion in the elbow, wrist and hand bones being found in front of the face area of the skull. Right ulna and radius, again after a flexion in elbow, are situated over the right humerus after both hands were crossed in arms. Left wrist and hand bones are not found in the material, explicable with taphonomic destruction. The most unusual in the position of the skeleton appears the position of the lower limbs. Being in articulation in hip joints after strong flexion the bones of lower limbs lie over the bones of the trunk. After strong flexion in the knee joint the right leg was compressed over the left hip and the bones of left foot are found in the pelvic area. Left leg, after flexion in the hip joint remained extended in the knee joint being discovered with the posterior sides upward and lying over the remaining bones of the skeleton – the bones of right lower limb, the trunk and hands and bones of left foot being found in front of the face area of the skull, at a little distance from the bones of right hand.

Other case of human remains in a pit from the investigated area presents pit N 1 in square 185/5 (**Fig. 2**). Field situation shows position of bones in articulation at joints, or undisturbed anatomical position of the dead body, respectively skeleton. Bone positions present a twist and while the pelvis is situated on its right side after the twisting in the vertebral column in lumbar area, the thoracic cage and shoulders, arms and hands and the skull are placed on their anterior/face sides towards the floor of the pit. Bones

of lower limbs are positioned on their right sides and present flexion in the knee joints. After the bones of thoracic cage were removed, position of the bones of the upper limbs is registered. Both of them are flexed in the elbows, the right one located under the thoracic cage. While the left arm should have been flexed in the wrist and twisted, with final placing of the hand on its left side, the bones of the right hand show its position as palmary oriented to the pit's floor (after the position of the metacarpals and phalanges with their anterior side to that direction).

The preservation of the anthropological material for laboratory investigation is appraised as poor, the skulls are in fragmentary state, which doesn't allow reconstruction, some of the long bones of limbs don't allow reconstruction in full length as well (**Table 1**), none of the pelvic girdles can be reconstructed.

**Table 1.** Long bones dimensions in *mm*. D – diameter of head; B – bicondylar breadth; stature in *cm* after Tr-Gl – Trotter-Glaeser and P-L – Pearson-Lee formulae

	pit N 1, square 185/5			pit 1	110	/10
Bone	L	D	B	L	D	B
Femur dx		39.7	7.37	415		
Femur sn	446					
Tibia dx				353		
Tibia sn	306			347		
Humerus dx			57	302		
Humerus sn		41.4***	56			
Radius dx	234	2		2285		
Radius sn				222		
Cl dx	<122			137		
Cl sn	148			142		
Stature Tr-Gl	160.13*			160.98**		
P-L	155.26			155.91		

\*(156.35÷163.9); \*(157.11÷164.85); \*\*\*vertical

In both cases sex identification determined female sex. The age of the individual from the pit N 1, square 185/5 is ascertained at about 20 years of age (18-20 up to 25) after the epiphysis synostosis soon before death of most of long bones of limbs and unfinished synostosis of the medial epiphysis of clavicles and epiphyses of the iliac bones. The age of the individual from the pit N 1, square 110/10 is ascertained to be a little more advanced and to had reached about 30-35 up to 40 years of age at time of death after the symphyseal surface relief and cranial sutures closure. Fragments of both skeletons don't present any perimortem traumatic lesions. Pathological changes can be appraised as insignificant in comparison for known for the period and characteristic to relatively young age of the individuals.

### Discussion

The situation regarded in the pit N 1, square 185/5 gives some possibilities (situation of right hand with palmar side to the floor of the pit and left one remaining in convulsive position) for interpretation of the complex as a homicide at the place. Pit 1 in square

110/10 presents a situation, which can be explained only with a deposition of strongly and neglectfully wrapped dead body, possibly right after the death before any rigidity to initiate. Many authors stressed that human remains in the pits in such complexes can't be interpreted as ordinary burials, but are result of sacrifice [4, 6]. Nevertheless, from the anthropological point of view it can't be stressed on one quality of the individuals, which to be shared in all cases. On the investigated complex both individuals are from female sex, it could be, but it is still hardly to be accepted that both individuals shared one age specific group from the point of view of age-depending social organization in the period, as one of the females is much younger. Both complexes show different situation, which testifies, that the individuals/their death bodies had been subjected to different actions before final deposition in the pits.

## Conclusions

Being an unusual situation, contrasting to regular burial, the presence of human remains in both pits could be regarded as deposition of bodies of individuals shared possibly unusual/unnatural death. Possibly both complexes were result of a homicide which gives some speculations that a penalty act happened. The deposition of bodies in the pits could be a result of an attempt for giving religious significance of sacrifice as an act of penalty or needs of purification of remains of individuals subjected to such acts.

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