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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ARTICLES

Valeva, J.: The Aniconic Decoration of the Thracian Tomb in Ruzhitsa Village.....	1
Tomas, A. / Jaskulska, E. / Dworniak-Jarych, J. / Dziurdzik, T. / Jęczmienowski, E. / Mech, A.: The Eastern Necropolis of <i>Novae</i> .....	37
Khrushkova, L. G.: The Monuments of Architecture of the Byzantine period in the North-Eastern Black Sea Region .....	65

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On the cover: a set of clay vessels in grave 1 in *Novae*, second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD; see the paper of Tomas et al. in this issue; photo by A.Tomas.

# The Aniconic Decoration of the Thracian Tomb in Ruzhitsa Village

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XXIV, 3 (2020), 1-35

Julia VALEVA

**Abstract:** The text examines the painted decoration of a Thracian tomb, dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century, discovered in the village of Ruzhitsa (Bulgaria). The aniconic type of this decoration gives the opportunity to discuss several important issues related to the development of wall painting in the Aegean, including the interdependence between vase- and wall painting. Important conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the painted geometric and plant motifs: their potential religious and eschatological significance is here explored. The ideosyncratic decorative system of the Thracian tomb is a local manifestation of the cultural koine in the Aegean Mediterranean during the 6<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

**Key words:** Ruzhitsa tomb, aniconism, nonfigured tomb decoration, relationship between pottery and wall painting, spiral, meander, diablo motif, chevrons motif, geometric motifs' symbolism.

## INTRODUCTION

The tomb was discovered in 2004 under a low tumulus located near the exit leading to the village of Ruzhitsa from the road that runs northeast from the town of Bolyarovo to the village of Golyamo Krushevo. The area belongs to the Bolyarovo municipality in the province of Yambol, one of the main towns in southeastern Bulgaria. The southern border of the Bolyarovo municipality follows the frontier between Bulgaria and Turkey. Salvage archaeological excavation of the site started after the mayor of Ruzhitsa village reported traces of treasure-hunting on the mound which unfortunately appeared to have been plundered<sup>1</sup>.

The tomb is situated in the southern part of the mound. It is orientated south-north with entrance from south (**figs. 1, 2**). The façade was found destroyed although the archaeologist reports that one to three rows of limestone “square” blocks were preserved in its upper part; the archaeologist supposes that the lower part of the façade was built of mudbricks which is unusual<sup>2</sup>.

In front of the tomb were found “a huge pyre”, broken vessels, a sacrificed dog (another sacrificed dog was discovered above the funerary chamber's roofing). It seems that this material has never been studied.

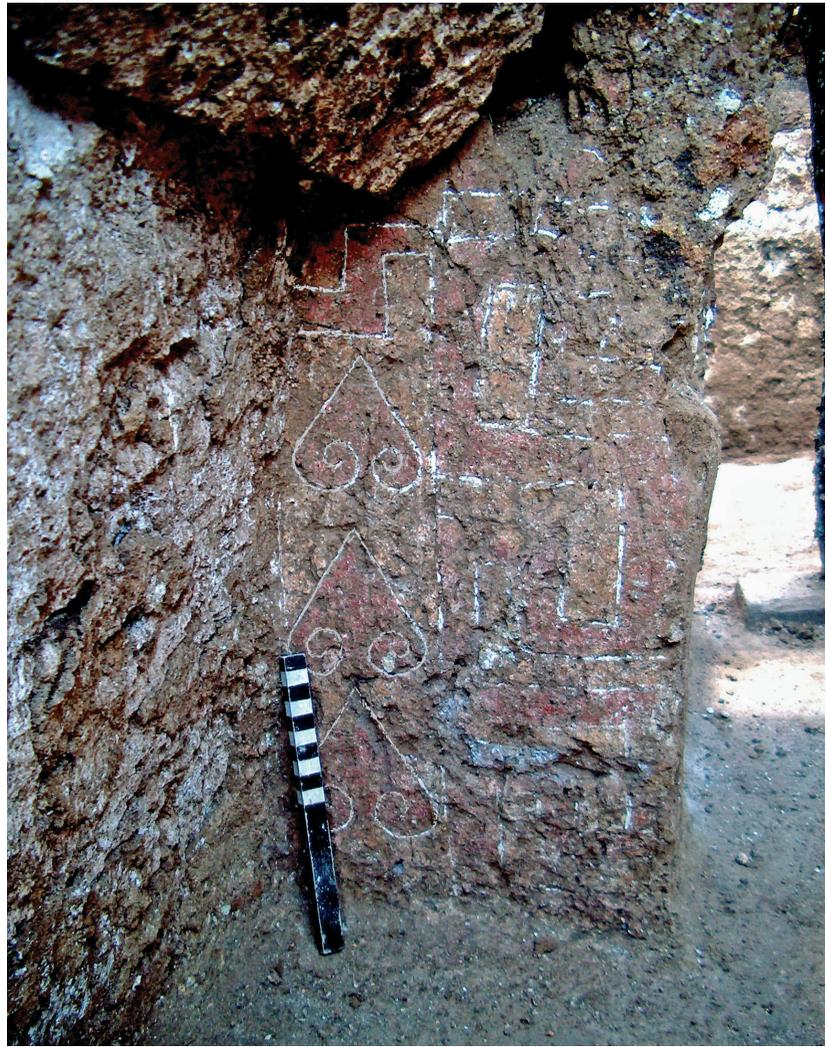
The tomb, which total length is 7.05 m, consists of dromos (corridor), antechamber and funerary chamber. It was built of limestone blocks, gneiss (?) slabs and mudbricks without binder.

The dromos is 3.08 m long, 0.70 m wide and 1.40 m high, the walls being 0.75-0.80 m thick. In the concise publication after the discovery it is said that the lower part of the dromos' walls are built of limestone blocks, while the upper part of rows of mudbricks. The roofing was flat.

The antechamber is 0.89 m long, and 1.08 m wide. No height is given, but the roofing is described as consisting of granite slabs, set transversely. Judging from the photos the rock is not granite but some

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the colleagues from the Regional Museum of History in Yambol for assisting me during my inspection of the fragments in the museum of Cabyle, as well as Dr. Lyudmil Vagalinski for his mediation. I also thank Dr. Lyubomir Tsonev for our discussions on Thracian megaliths and Ruzhitsa tomb. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Denver Graninger for his encouragement and the editing of the English version of my text.

<sup>2</sup> The tomb is 1.5 km far from the village of Ruzhitsa: azimuth N 42° 09.524'; E 26° 51.718'; Цонев in <http://www.balkanmegaliths.bg/journey.com/Bulgaria/SpecMegObj/QM/QM-009BG/QM-009BG.html> (2019-10-23). Today it is impossible to see the tomb, reburied for reason of protection, therefore all measurements and descriptions of architecture follow the information given in the brief primarily publications: Arpe 2005a; 2005b. About the façade and the strange supposition that limestone blocks topped a mud-brick lower part of the entrance wall: *ibid.*, 146-147 (unless “façade” means the entrance to the dromos). There is no published ground plan of the tomb. No conservation work has ever been done in the tomb. The building stone, defined in the archaeological communication as granite, is most probably gneiss, a rock found largely in the Rhodopes and Sakar mountain (consultation L. Tsonev).



**Fig. 3.** Ruzhitsa tomb. Lower part of the wall with entrance to the funerary chamber (photo D. Agre)

long, 0.70 m wide and 0.40 m high<sup>3</sup>. Unusually, a cup was found built in its structure<sup>4</sup>.

The entrance to the funerary chamber is 1.30 m high, 0.60 m wide and 0.66 m deep. The archaeologist conjectures a wooden double-leaf door between the antechamber and the funerary chamber<sup>5</sup>. The entry wall to the funerary chamber, built of limestone blocks (?), is additionally packed with mudbricks (5 cm thick). A thin layer of diluted mud covers not only this wall but all the other interior walls as well, which are painted white, but a black strip at the floor level. Only the wall around the entry to the funerary chamber is decorated with motifs with symbolic character (**fig. 3**).

Most of the paintings were found fallen on the floor of the antechamber but fortunately on both sides of the entry up to 0.60 m the paintings remained *in situ*. The motifs are incised in the mud bricks covered with clay solution, and are painted with yellow, red and white colours. The painting technique is wrongly defined as fresco<sup>6</sup>.

Although the site was excavated sixteen years ago, it remains scantily published, without illustrations, except for a reconstruction of the painted decoration of the funerary chamber's facade which is anonymous and is supported neither by photographs, nor by any dimensions of the paintings. For this reason we shall use only those parts of this reconstruction which are backed up by photographs.

<sup>3</sup> Recently about funerary beds in Thracian tombs: Стоянова 2018.

<sup>4</sup> There is no description of the cup.

<sup>5</sup> No proofs are given concerning the conjecture about the wooden door. The present inaccessibility to the tomb prevents us from expressing an opinion on this matter.

<sup>6</sup> Arpe 2005a; 2005b. The reconstruction is illustrated in Arpe 2005b, 87, and on the Internet site cited in note 2.

# The Eastern Necropolis of *Novae*

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Justyna DWORNIAK-JARYCH / Tomasz DZIURDZIK /  
Emil JĘCZMIENOWSKI / Anna MECH

**Abstract:** The excavations carried out in 2016-2019 (supported by the Polish National Science Centre) to the east of the legionary camp of *Novae* shed new light on the function of this place before it was surrounded by new fortifications and became part of the Late Roman town. This paper combines the newly acquired data with the available information from earlier research in order to analyse the eastern necropolis of *Novae*, a so far little-known burial ground identified in the studied area. Reconstruction of its location, chronology, burial rites and history is offered, illuminating an obscure aspect of the history of *Novae*, especially the changes that occurred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

One inhumation and three cremation burials have been unearthed, as well as a structure which is identified as a funeral pyre (*ustrinum*) or a monumental grave. The single inhumation grave was that of a child. The excavation results combined with anthropological analysis of the remains suggest that two individuals were cremated within the grave structures (*bustum*-type burials), while the third burial was an *ustrinum* type, the body cremated elsewhere, the remains collected and transferred to the grave. The two individuals in the *bustum*-type burials were men, whose bone features and pathologies may be related to a soldier's activities and diet. The furnishing of the graves was not expensive, but the deceased were provided with coins and clay vessels used for eating and drinking, some of them placed on the funeral pyre before cremation, and some used during a sacrificial feast. Combined with the earlier finds, it is possible to state that the eastern necropolis was biritual and the burials mostly followed typical Roman burial customs. It is possible that some of the gravestones found reused in various parts of *Novae* could have originally come from this area.

The unearthed part of the necropolis is dated by the small finds (coins and pottery) as well as its stratigraphy to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The final period of the eastern necropolis could have taken place in the 260s and 270s, after several Gothic invasions devastated the region. After the cemetery ceased to function, an unusual change of function took place, as it was included in the area protected by the new fortifications of the so-called "annex" and started to be used for habitation and manufacturing, even though it was still recognizable as a former graveyard.

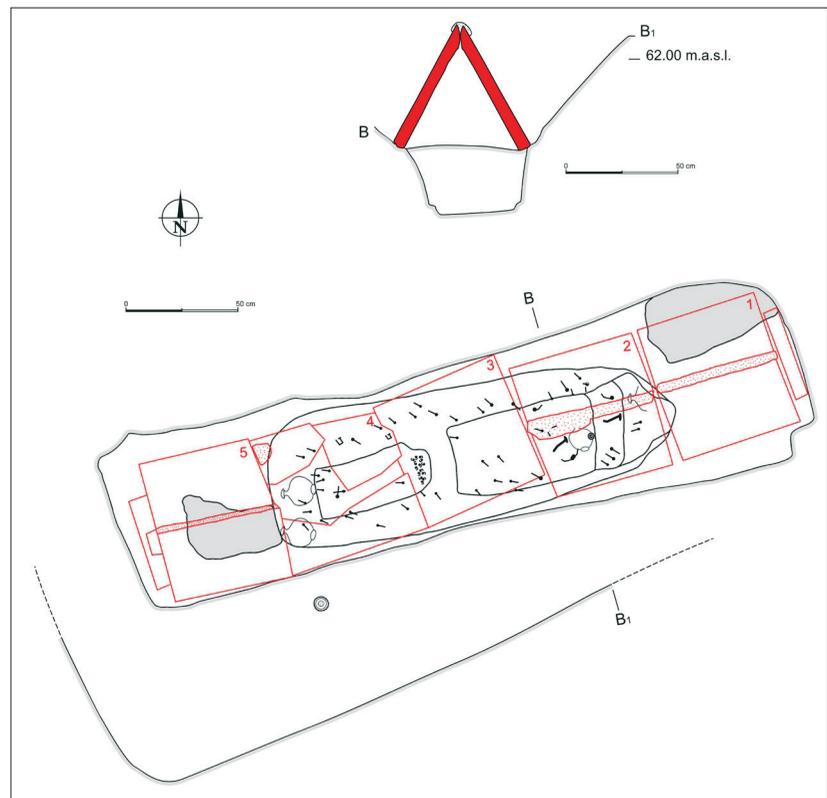
**Key words:** Roman army, legionary fortress, cemetery, cremation burials, tile graves, Lower Moesia, *Novae*.

The legionary fortress and the Late Roman town of *Novae*, the base of the First Italic legion (**fig. 1**), one of the largest archaeological sites on the Lower Danube, has been regularly excavated since 1960<sup>1</sup>. Polish and Bulgarian archaeologists excavated the fortifications and main buildings of the legionary base (**fig. 2**), including the headquarters (*principia*), the military hospital (*valetudinarium*), the legionary baths (*thermae legionis*), one of the officer's houses near the main street (in the *scannum tribunorum*), and – recently – two large buildings near the West Gate (*porta principalis sinistra*)<sup>2</sup>.

In contrast to the fortress, not much is known about its closest vicinity. Two places within the *canabae* have been excavated so far – an extramural residence outside the West Gate and the *mith-*

<sup>1</sup> Excavation reports have been published in *Archeologia* (Warsaw), since 1961, *Известия на Археологическия Институт* (София) and *Археология* (София), since 1963, as well as in *Novensia* (Warsaw), since 1987.

<sup>2</sup> A brief summary of the history of excavations and the results was presented by Sarnowski et al. 2012.



**Fig. 6.** *Novae* – eastern necropolis. Grave 1 (drawing by E. Jęczmienowski)



**Fig. 7.** *Novae*. Grave 1 after discovery. The view from the north (photo A. Tomas)

which implies near-complete destruction of the organic component of the bone tissue, including DNA (Harbeck et al. 2011, 197-198). The modern forensic research indicates that the DNA recovered from remains cremated at the higher temperature is of the unknown origin and does not form a reliable source for further analysis (Cattaneo et al. 1999; von Wurmb-Schwark et al. 2005). The presence of iron hobnails fused to the bones of the right foot (1<sup>st</sup> metatarsal and cuboid) was recorded, which is direct evidence of the individual wearing hobnailed shoes during cremation.

The age of the individual has been approximated as a middle adult (between 27 and 35 years old based on the dental crown wear and Suchey-Brooks pubic symphysis aging method – White / Folkens

# The Monuments of Architecture of the Byzantine period in the North-Eastern Black Sea Region<sup>1</sup>

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Liudmila G. KHRUSHKOVA

**Abstract:** The article considers a group of monuments of Christian architecture located in the north-eastern part of the Black Sea region, the least studied archaeologically. In the Byzantine era, the southern part of Krasnodar region of the Russian Federation was the northern part of Abkhazia, which in the church relation was subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Ten churches of the 6<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are in a state of ruins, have been studied here. They belong to different architectural types: two basilicas, two domed churches, one cross-shaped and five one-nave churches. Several architectural fragments testify to buildings unknown to us. The most important domed churches (Loo, Vesoloe) closely followed the Byzantine tradition, other structures differed in local features, for example, the Lesnoe basilica 1. Many features of the churches examined reveal their proximity to the architectural monuments of neighboring Abkhazia and Alania, also closely connected with Byzantium.

**Key words:** Byzantium, Eastern Black Sea Coast, Abazgiya, architecture, domed church, basilica, one-nave church.

In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Moscow Archaeological Society, under the guidance of its founder count Alexei Sergeevič Uvarov (1828-1884) (Khrushkova 2012a, 1263-1264), carried on an ambitious program which studied the Christian monuments of the Caucasus (Khrushkova 2012b, 240-248). Uvarov's wife, countess Praskovya Sergeevna Uvarova (1840-1924), was also an active researcher of the Caucasus; being an energetic and fearless traveler, she was the first woman in Russia who became a professional archeologist (Khrushkova 2012c, 77-81). Uvarova wrote that she had ridden around the Black Sea district "through the length and breadth because there were very few monuments of Christian art in the full sense of the word in this area" (Уварова 1894, 5-6). The Black Sea District in that time included part of the present-day Krasnodar Territory and the northern part of Abkhazia, from the Psou River to the town of Gagra (**fig. 1**). Since the time of Uvarova's archaeological travels our knowledge of Christian monuments in this area has progressed significantly. This article follows some of my previous publications (Khrushkova 2018, 61-102) and addresses to the studies of the Christian monuments of the North-Eastern Black Sea Region.

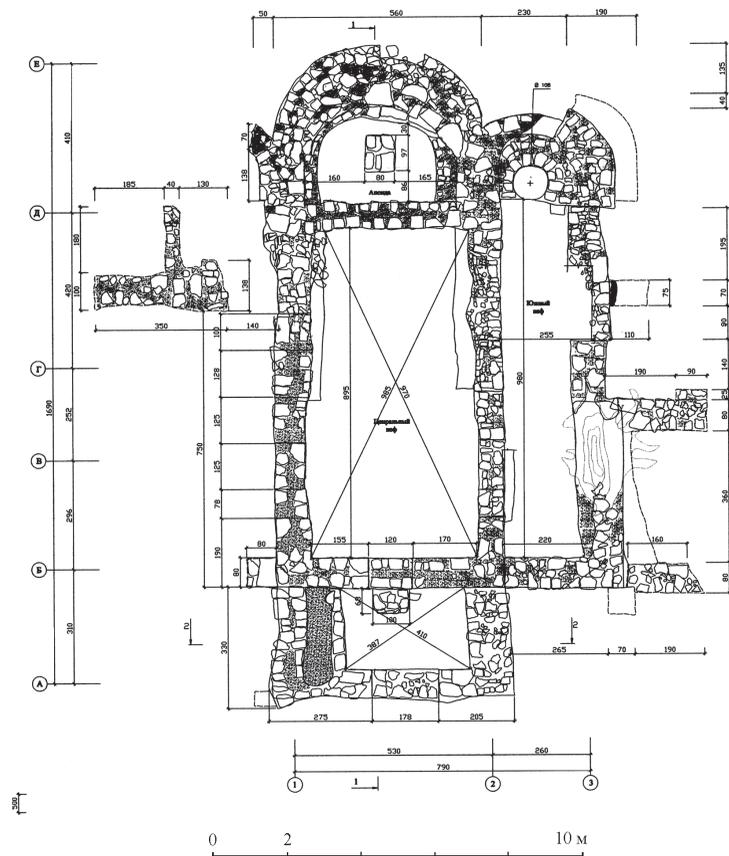
The Krasnodar Territory of the Russian Federation was established as an administrative unit in 1937. It occupies the territory of the North-Eastern Black Sea coast region and the eastern part is located in the North-West Caucasus. All ecclesiastical and secular historical sources, from Strabo's descriptions to the witnesses of the Western European travelers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emphasize that this land was far detached from the civilized world and its population was barbarous. Of all the Pontic regions, Krasnodar Territory's settlements and necropolises, fortification and ecclesiastical architecture of the Middle Ages have always been the least studied. It is often difficult to match items from

<sup>1</sup> Translation from the Russian by Zoya Metlitskaya. This study is based on the research supported by the Program of Fundamental Research of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences and of the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the Russian Federation. The Research project 1.2.1.

**BASILICA LESNOE-2**

The basilica Lesnoe-2 (Lesnyanskaya-2) is located near the Lesnoe-1, 0.8 km to the north-west from the northern end of the Lesnoe village. D. E. Vasilinenko and S. V. Vereščagin excavated it in 2007-2008 (Василиненко / Верещагин 2012, 284-287). The church was built on a rocky basement on a site surrounded by forest. Some parts of the walls with the marks of reconstruction have survived. During its first stage, the Lesnoe-2 church was a basilica with nave and aisles and three prominent semicircular apses, and a narthex (fig. 8). The apses didn't intercommunicate with each other. Nave and aisles were divided by two rows of massive pillars, three pillars in each; the narthex was divided into three parts. Two additional rooms adjoined the southern longitudinal wall of the basilica. One of them was adjacent to the doorway. Only a small fragment of the northern longitudinal wall of the basilica survived in its eastern part; from the northern apse only a fragment of the masonry, adjacent to the central apse, survived. A porch, survived on the northern side. The basilica was built of light limestone; the masonry was regular, row by row.

A baptismal font was placed in the southern apse of the basilica (fig. 9). Its masonry does not differ from that of the apse. It was erected around the same time as the church itself. The font is round in plan; steps flanking it from four sides give it the shape of a cross. A neophyte and a priest performing the rite of baptism approached the font from the western side from the aisle. The inside the font is coated with a thick layer of hydraulic reddish mortar, there is a round hole for water drainage in its center. The font in the shape of the circle and the cross



**Fig. 8.** Lesnoe 2. Basilica  
(plan by the OAO "Pamiatniki Kubani")