

BURIALS IN THE AREA OF THE FOENI CULTURE GROUP

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The Foeni culture group has recently been defined as a result of systematic research undertaken over the past 15 years on the sites at Foeni, Parţa-tell II and Uivar. At this stage of research, its cultural content, the territory it occupied, as well as its ethnocultural relations with other contemporary civilisations have been specified (*Draşovean F., 1994a; 1994b; 1997; 2004; 2005*). The analysis of Foeni type finds and their comparison with those of the Petreşti culture in Transylvania allowed us to postulate the fact that the Foeni group played a decisive role in the genesis of the Petreşti culture, within the framework of a complex process – of migration, diffusion and cultural synthesis (*Draşovean F., 1996, 7, 85-86, 98-99; 2002, 76-77; 2004, 27 and foll.*). Moreover, in the light of the new archaeological finds in Transylvania (*Gligor M., 2006*), we may consider the material of the Foeni group as an initial phase of the Petreşti culture. In what follows, the presentation of information regarding the burials of the Foeni group in Banat within the context of similar discoveries in Transylvania is meant to bring to attention some additional data which sustains the crucial role of the Foeni group in the genesis of the Petreşti culture.

In Banat, research undertaken over the past 15 years at Foeni and Parţa-tell II led to the discovery of two inhumation burials which belong to bearers of this culture group.

The Foeni grave was discovered on surface 7, quadrats 3-5, at the depth of 0.6 m., at the bottom of the anthropic deposits (fig. 1). This surface is situated on the north/north-eastern limit of the Foeni settlement, an area where the culture layer is thinner, measuring only 0.3 m. The grave pit could not be defined. The bones of the thorax had been disturbed, and many of them were missing. The body lay crouched on the right side with legs strongly flexed. The left hand – of which only the ulna was preserved –

was brought under the mandible, while the head was in the south with the face eastwards. Due to the fact that few bones had not been disturbed, the precise position of the skeleton in relation to the cardinal points could not be fully established, but it can be approximated that it was oriented north-south. No grave goods were found.

Anthropological analysis revealed that the grave belonged to a female of about 35 years of age, about 149 cm in height estimated by the Manouvrier method, or 157 cm. according to the Bach method (*Muntean M., Vermeşan H., Muntean C., 1996, 289*). Very interestingly, the left femur showed signs of having been affected by poliomyelitis, which makes it the oldest case of the disease in medical history (*Idem, 291*).

The Parţa-tell II grave was discovered in quadrats 17-18, at a depth of 0.80 m, at level II, which belongs to the Foeni group (fig. 2). The bones were in anatomical position and there were no grave goods. The body had probably been laid in a pit which, despite our efforts, could not be defined. The skeleton, which was in anatomical connection, crouched and lying on its right side, was oriented east-west with the head eastwards, and face to the north. The lower limbs are heavily flexed and the forearms are flexed and placed on the arms. The left hand, strongly flexed and bent so as to overlap the humerus and the radius, was brought under the mandible, and the right one, placed next to the chest, was flexed and partially beneath the bones of the thorax.

The skeleton was that of a female who had died at the age of around 20-21, whose height was estimated at 153.5 cm by the Breitingger method. The metrical data, the indices and the morphological aspect revealed the fact that the young woman belonged to the Mediterranean anthropological type (*Muntean M., Vermeşan H., 1994, 138*).

One of the common features of the two finds was the fact that the grave pits could not be defined in either case. This lead us to the conclusion that they had been dug at shallow depth in the Foeni culture layer and did not disturb other soils or anthropic levels of other colours or consistency, which would have made the graves visible.

Also, in the case of both burials the skeletons belong to women – a 20-21 year old (at Parţa) and respectively a 35-year old one, at Foeni. From an anthropological point of view, they both have similar anthropometric data and belong to the gracile-Mediterranean type, proving the fact that the

bearers of the Foeni group were a Mediterranean population with an average height of about 1.5 m.

As far as the funerary rite is concerned, in the case of both Banat burials the bodies were laid on the right side, in a crouching position, with strongly flexed legs and with the left hand brought under the mandible. In the case of the Parța grave, the right hand is parallel with the thorax, and the ribcage was placed with the ventral side down. No funerary offerings were found.

In addition to these similarities, several differences could also be noticed. Thus, although both graves belong to females, the orientation of the axis of the skeletons is different. This may also be due to the fact that, in the case of the Foeni grave, the precarious conservation manifested in the lack of the thoracic and lumbar bones failed to reveal its precise orientation, forcing us to resort to approximation.

In the context of the funerary deposits of the age, different orientations of the bodies within the same cemetery are frequently encountered. They could be determined by a number of factors such as, for instance, the position of the sun in the sky in relation with the season when the burials were made, perhaps a certain status held by the deceased within the social hierarchy, as well as other causes which are unknown at this stage of the research. Without attempting a detailed analysis of the matter, it should however be said that differences determined by the different orientations of funerary deposits within the same cemetery or culture area are no exception within Neolithic Age funerary rituals (*Lichter C., 2001*, and bibliography). A similar situation can be noticed in the burials of the Petrești culture area, where orientations alternate between north-east/south-west (the Daia Română grave) and south-east/north-west (the Ocna Sibiului grave); as a consequence of the orientation of the skeletons, all the other data changes – with the exception of the side on which the deceased were laid.

Despite these differences, several common features are revealed by comparing the information related to the funerary rite and ritual of the bearers of the Foeni group and those of the Petrești culture, although there is still little information – especially in what regards anthropological data. Up to the present, six graves have been found in the Transylvanian area (*Paul I., 1992*, 115 and notes 41-44), displaying a series of characteristics common to those found in Banat. The first of these is that both in Banat and

in the intra-Carpathic area, the burials were discovered within settlements rather than in cemeteries (*Idem 1992*, 115). At the same time, the grave pits could not be defined (*Idem*, 116), which presupposes either that the body was laid in a shallow grave, or that it was laid on the surface and covered with a layer of soil which belonged to the culture stratum. These are the only two cases in which the pit of the grave cannot be identified.

Despite the fact that at the moment only one anthropological analysis exists in the Petrești area – the case of the Ocna Sibiului skeleton (*Idem*, 116) – alongside the conclusion that the Daia Română one belongs to the Mediterranean anthropological type, the available specialist analyses reveal the fact that the bearers of the Petrești culture were a Mediterranean population (*Idem*, 117). Moreover, the anthropometric data is similar to that of skeletons discovered in Banat, indicating that they belong to the same gracile-Mediterranean population.

To conclude, all the anthropological information and part of the information regarding funerary ritual that has been presented and analysed above demonstrates that the bearers of the Foeni group and those of the Petrești culture are the same population of the gracile-Mediterranean type. This information, corroborated with stratigraphic data from a number of Transylvanian sites (*Lazarovici G., 2000*, 42 and fig. 3; Lumea Nouă, information courtesy of Mihai Gligor), with comparative, typological and stylistic analyses of the early Foeni and Petrești pottery (*Drașovean F., 2004*) and archaeozoological data (*El Susi G., 2004*, 40, 43), be it previously published or as yet unpublished, demonstrates more and more clearly the idea that the Petrești culture was born as a result of an influx of population due mainly to a process of migration of some Foeni communities from Banat, communities which are in their turn linked to, and originate in the ethnocultural phenomena of the Thessalo-Macedonian area (*Drașovean F., 2005*).

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Fig. 1

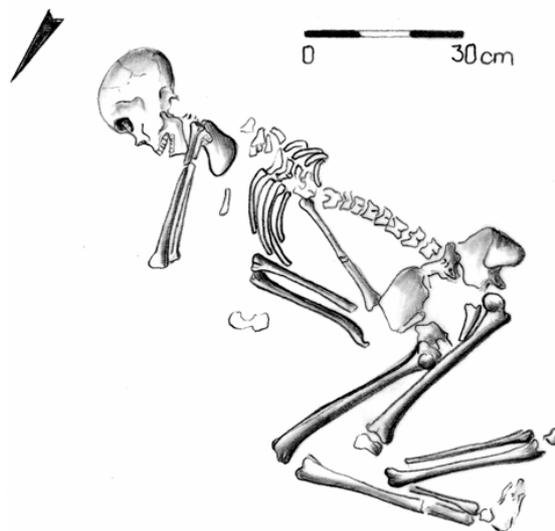


Fig. 2