**S15B. Session**: ***Man and his companions (horse and dog) in Eurasian Graves (3rd mill. BC-1st mill. AD)***

**Organizers: Valeriu Sîrbu, Cristian Schuster (Romania)**

**Crossing on horseback the Balkans, the Danube and the Carpathians**

**in the Second Iron Age**

Valeriu Sîrbu (Romania)

In the ancient societies the horse played an important part in battles, during the hunt, the sport competitions and ceremonies, therefore it had a distinct status, which is reflected in its presence in the grave, next to the deceased, sometimes together with all the harness gear, fighting or chariots.

The aristocrat-horse tandem is the best documented in the aristocratic tumular graves of the 5th – 3rd c. BC, when one could see almost everywhere horse burials with items made of precious metals. Sometimes, the rite is similar for people and horses as well, either in inhumations (Agighiol, Peretu, Sboryanovo, Vraca etc.) or cremation (Cugir), but there are situations with different rites, the humans have been cremated while the horses have been inhumed (Zimnicea).

Such gestures, like the inhumation of numerous horses in graves, animals with such a high value in society, sometimes with harness gear made of gold and silver, might indicate a profound motivation

The main issue is to see, for each case, whether we could prove the horse sacrifice at the rider’s death, or they both died in battle, at hunt or accidentally. The arrow heads (Agighiol, Zimnicea) or the lance heads (Liliace) found at the horse skeletons might indicate either the horses have been sacrificed, or they have been hit during the fight. Still, there are certain proofs of sacrifice, like in the case of a horse found in Helvetia tumulus, the area of Sevtopolis – Duvanli, where the blood spread on the floor and the walls of the antechamber stands for its killing on the spot. The burial of several horses in the same tumulus, either inhumed (Agighiol, Sveshtari, Yankovo, Vraca), or cremated (Cugir), might mean the sacrifice of some of them, otherwise it is difficult to accept the idea of several horses dying (in battle or accidentally) at the same time as their owner.

The horses were deposed in different places of the tumuli, separately in dromos or antechamber, or together with the deceased in the main chamber. As we do not have written information, we could not understand the motivations and the different manner of deposing the horses in the graves. For example, one could ask why, in some very rich, “royal” tumuli graves, they acted differently: at Agighiol and Vraca, they inhumed three horses in each grave, at Peretu, they buried only the head and the legs of an animal, all of them dating from the 4th c BC, while at Cugir, in the 1st c BC, the three horses were cremated together with the deceased. What did they do with the horse body when they buried only the head and the legs: did they eat them at the funerary ceremony or did they consecrated /offered it to the deities? We could not, for the time being, answer this question.

The analysis of the different types of information – written sources, iconographic representations, inhumations, figurines – prove, beyond any doubt, the prominent place this noble animal had in the mentalities of the Thracian aristocracy.