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LILIA S. BAYUN, V.E. OREL

PALAEO-BALKANIC EPIGRAPHIC MONUMENTS:
NEW DISCOVERIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

The S(itovo) inscription found more than 60 years ago in the Rhodopes (Bulgaria) aroused a number of bold hypotheses and original interpretations. Most of them, however, were not admitted to scholarly editions the latter being rather cautious for many Bulgarian archaeologists from Sofia considered the S. inscription to be either a fake or an accidental combination of natural clefts and cracks in the rock. But since the problem of deciphering the S. inscription was arising from time to time, so in order to finally close it down an expedition was organized (in summer 1988) including some Bulgarian archaeologists, epigraphists, geologists, geodesists and other experts¹. As a result of this expedition the S. inscription was declared to be a sequence of natural cracks in the rock that were intentionally "finished" by a local patriot wishing to glorify his village not rich in historical monuments (s. "L'inscription", p. 133, 139). The main arguments of the authors in favour of this point of view were as follows:

1. The signs of the S. inscription seem not to be repeated or separated from one another (s. "L'inscription", p. 132, 136).

2. According to the authors these signs are not similar to those of other inscriptions found in Bulgaria, therefore it is impossible to decipher them (s. L'origine, p. 145).

3. The rock surface with the signs appears to be a natural formation; the authors consider it (though without any reason) to be "a relatively smooth vertical fracturation" (s. L'origine, p. 144).

4. The inspection of the rock cracks in the radius of 15 m from the inscription showed a similarity in the arrangement of the Sitovo groups of cracks and those on other rocks which, according to the authors, proves their synchronous origin dating from the eocene time (s. L'origine, p. 144-145), i.e. the middle epoch of paleogene (the first kainozoic period).

When getting thoroughly acquainted with the results of the above expedition one can not help asking questions caused partly by erroneous statements (s. below) and partly by discrepancies between the conclusions of the expedition members, for instance, in the chronological evaluation of the Sitovo "cracks" dated either 1928 A.D. (s. "L'inscription", p. 139) or the eocene epoch (s. above). All of this, together with some inaccuracy in presenting the material in the above-mentioned reports² made us undertake a re-examination