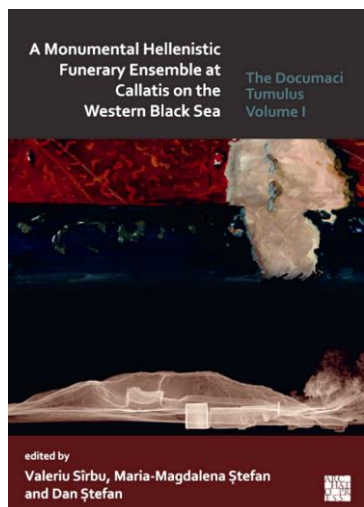


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Valeriu Sirbu, Maria-Magdalena Ștefan and Dan Ștefan, eds., *A Monumental Hellenistic Funerary Ensemble at Callatis on the Western Black Sea: The Documaci Tumulus*, I (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021), 330 p.

The shared interest in the research on Thracian themes in the first millennium BC generated the close cooperation over many years between the team submitting the manuscript *A Monumental Hellenistic Funerary Ensemble at Callatis on the Western Black Sea: The Documaci Tumulus* and myself – researcher of Hellenistic *necropoleis* and other sites within the structure of the Getic political and religious centre in the Sboryanovo Reserve in northeastern Bulgaria. That cooperation has found expression not only in our participation together in various annual specialised academic conferences, but also in exchange visits and consultations in the course of exploring archaeological sites on both banks of the Danube River, on Bulgarian and Romanian territory.

I became familiar with the Documaci tumulus back in the decades when the problems of its protection and preservation were extremely severe, as in all countries in the Balkans during the post-communist period, with the rather debatable interpretation of major finds during those years, due to the fragmentary character of the excavations. It was a pleasure to learn about the successful financing of the next stage in the exploration of the tumulus as the *KALLA Project – The Interdisciplinary Exploration of Tumuli Landscapes and Monumental Hellenistic Tombs in Callatis*, implemented in the period August 2017 – November 2019, as well as to be present on site during the implementation of the project, when a number of new aspects of that exceptional burial complex became clarified owing to extremely precise terrain work. The purpose of these new excavations, 27 years after the monument was found, was to allow a re-evaluation and completion of the existing scarce documentation, and to answer questions about the significance of certain structures, the sequence of building phases and a long list of interventions. It is the first monographic study on one of the most important and probably spectacular ancient funerary monuments recently excavated on the western Black Sea coast, and to recognise the complex connections that the monument established with the wider Hellenistic *koiné*. The results both of the explorations of the actual tumulus and of its environment are currently presented in the reviewed publication. The results are substantiated and enriched with the most comprehensive possible analysis of the archived documentation from earlier explorations of the tumulus, as well as through the extremely exhaustive scope of the interdisciplinary methods applied in situ and under laboratory conditions, including the analysis of faunal remains; therefore I have absolutely no methodological concerns (chapter 2).

The proposed publication consists of 330 pages, an inventory of the construction elements, a catalogue of the finds, 191 illustrations and 20 tables. It can be defined as a model for publishing the results of archaeological research. It is the result of the efforts of a numerous interdisciplinary international team of archaeologists, PhD students, mineralogists, geologists and architects both from Romania and from other countries (Bulgaria, Poland, etc.), headed by Prof. Valeriu Sîrbu, on behalf of the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, with optimally preserved continuity through the participation of earlier researchers of the tumulus as well.

The exhaustive presentation of the history of the explorations (chapter 1) demonstrates the complexity of the tasks before the team with a view to the comprehensive interpretation of the results of the earlier stages of the explorations as well. In the structure of the presentation the authors have chosen extremely appropriately to examine in greater depth and in a broader perspective the cultural and historical context of the tumulus, prior to presenting their own findings (chapter 3). From a historical perspective, on the basis of abundant written and epigraphic sources, the authors examine the role of Callatis in the fourth-third century BC as a political player on a secondary stage of the Diadochi wars. That history corresponds to the chronological interval in which the cemeteries of the ancient city exhibited their greatest extent and the earliest mounds were piled. Even more exhaustive information can be found in the part of the book on the landmarks of the urban zone of Callatis: fortifications, sacred areas and harbour. During the Macedonian rule, Callatis built its first fortified wall, and the first two attested levels of habitation in the city's stratigraphy date precisely from the fourth-third century BC. The systematisation of the observations on the burial grounds at Callatis during the fourth-third century BC is important for the correlation between the public ownership over the territories of the *necropoleis* and the private ownership of the tumuli.

The Documaci tomb is examined also as an element in the group of four tombs in Callatis, and even if it is the most exquisite, it is a part of a regional phenomenon. These tombs are in the centre of a debate concerning ancient identities – as graves of tribal “non-Greek” leaders, either Thracians or Scythians. If the funerary model exhibited by the barrel-vaulted chamber tombs around Callatis has been perceived so far as being in obvious contrast with the normative burial practices of a democratic Greek city, owing to the broad territorial scope, the authors propose a new – third – interpretation model based on the comparison between the two series of tombs from Callatis and Odessos, representing a coherent group sharing features regarding the spatial relation with the cities' burial grounds, the employed construction techniques and chronology of their construction period following the connection of the tombs with the presence of the Macedonian garrisons activated during the wars of the Diadochi.

A justified explanation is given of the greater spread of the Macedonian-type tombs in Northern Balkan Thrace because of the younger centralisation of power and Lysimachus's intense diplomacy of the early third century BC in northeastern Thrace.

Chapter 4 reveals the tumulus as the highest located point above the city and as the main element of a group of mound graves which functioned as the western margin of the Callatis funerary area. The general geographic features and the elements of the regional geology and hydrogeology are also examined. In this respect, the features of the

burial complexes, which were characteristic of the entire Thracian Hellenistic world, are indisputable, with a mandatory highlight: a significant cult burial complex. The research team has contributed substantially to the elucidation of the functions of the different elements of the cult-burial complex (the *crepidoma*, the building techniques, the places for ritual practices (*enagismoî*), the stone platforms, etc.) by applying a wide range of archaeometric studies and excavations of key sectors (chapter 5).

The reconstruction of the volume of the tumular embankment and the observations on the stratigraphy and building techniques comprising supporting stone walls (chapter 6: The Mound), as well as the conclusion that all elements were parts of the same funerary design scheme, gravitating around the element that drives out of the ordinary the funerary ensemble of Documaci Mound, are convincing. The massive cuboid stone structure to sustain a free-standing monument exposed on top of the mound is with analysed masonry, geological features, petrophysical characteristics of the blocks, alteration and degradation processes, initial height, visibility significance, etc. (chapter 7). The Documaci Mound was a landmark for navigators, at large distances along the shore, with its massive marker on top.

The examination of the parallels of that sophisticated architectural and ritual ensemble constitutes an essential contribution by the team on the spreading and importance of commemorative constructions of that type in the Balkan area resulting from the indisputable Macedonian presence. The very recently unearthed pedestal, fragments of columns and capitals of a temple in the Manole tumulus near Plovdiv, dated to the Roman period, in which no tomb has been found, demonstrates the preservation of the Hellenistic building traditions during the Roman Age as well.

The tomb (chapter 8) is studied in great detail: its construction, masonry, techniques and tools for processing the stone blocks, looting pits, funerary furniture, the link with the two phases in the building of the *dromos*, the entrance area and petrographic analyses.

The mineralogical study of plasters and pigments, and the microscopic analyses of the floor and wall plasters in chapter 9 present the painted decoration and the materials and techniques used in the Documaci tomb against the background of the Early Hellenistic funerary artistic trends.

In the Concluding Remarks the authors reiterate their view that the Documaci tumulus, having been prepared in advance by its future occupants with the involvement of specialised architect(s) and painters of possible Amphipolitan origin, was designed to function as a tomb complex for a very rich family who broke with its funerary rules of standardised citizenship. These architectural and artistic models can be recognised in those tombs dated after the mid-fourth century BC around the cities governed by Macedonian elites, many of a militarised origin, or by their political associates. Therefore, in addition to being a momentary fashion, a declaration of richness and economic potential, this particular type of tomb has to be seen first as a political statement. Certain afterlife beliefs involving the concept of the tomb as a house and the need for its periodic visitation may justify it, but always in connection with the political factor, especially in a period when the democratic regimes of the *poleis* clashed with the Macedonian garrisons' rule. The Documaci commissioners belonged to the Callatian ritual community, and their ties with the political factions supported the Macedonian interests and their consistent economic capacity. Here I would add that the ideological aspect

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deserves more special attention, because Macedons and Thracians shared equally strongly the ideas of Orphism that predetermined the use of the tombs for the specific rite of immortalisation. It is not by chance that Plato considered the tombs with semicylindrical vault as being an example of absolute perfection, worthy of the citizens of his ideal state.

The monograph *A Monumental Hellenistic Funerary Ensemble at Callatis on the Western Black Sea: The Documaci Tumulus* is an exceptional contribution to the comprehensive publishing of a landmark monument of burial rites and practices during the Hellenistic Age, allowing extensive larger-scale comments and new interpretations of significant issues of the Hellenistic reality.

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